PENGUIN CLASSICS

SOLITUDE_AURORA

Are You Ready For It?

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Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/53284729.

Rating:

Mature

Archive Warnings:

Graphic Depictions Of Violence, Rape/Non-Con, Underage Sex

Categories:

F/F, F/M, M/M

Fandoms:

Harry Potter - J. K. Rowling, Hunger Games Trilogy - Suzanne Collins, Hunger Games Series - All Media Types

Relationships:

Harry Potter/Tom Riddle, Albus Dumbledore/Gellert Grindelwald, Lucius Malfoy/Narcissa Black Malfoy, Andromeda Black Tonks/Ted Tonks, Sirius Black/Remus Lupin, James Potter/Lily Evans Potter

Characters:

Harry Potter, Tom Riddle, Albus Dumbledore, Gellert Grindelwald, Narcissa Black Malfoy, Lucius Malfoy, Andromeda Black Tonks, Ted Tonks, Bellatrix Black Lestrange, Lestrange Sr. | Tom Riddle's Schoolmate, Nott Sr. (Harry Potter), Hermione Granger, Ron Weasley, Fred Weasley, George Weasley, Ginny Weasley, Original Characters, Original Female Character(s), Original Male Character(s), Original Child Character(s), Original Non-Binary Character, Charlie Weasley, Neville Longbottom, Sirius Black, Regulus Black, James Potter, Lily Evans Potter, Peter Pettigrew, Barty Crouch Jr., Susan Bones, Amelia Bones, Severus Snape, Cedric Diggory, Viktor Krum, Cho Chang

Additional Tags:

Minor Regulus Black/James Potter, POV Harry Potter, POV Tom Riddle, District 12 (Hunger Games), Evil Albus Dumbledore, Past Albus Dumbledore/Gellert Grindelwald, Dark Albus Dumbledore, Gellert Grindelwald Being an Asshole, Harry Potter Needs a Hug, BAMF Harry Potter, Tom Riddle is Not Voldemort, Tom Riddle Loves Harry Potter, Smitten Tom Riddle, Teenage Tom Riddle, Sane Tom Riddle, Harry Potter is So Done, Harry Potter is a Little Shit, No Harry Potter Knowledge Required, Alternate Universe - Hunger Games Setting, Hunger Games Victor Prostitution, Hunger Games

Tributes, Hunger Games Victors, Hunger Games-Typical Death/Violence, 74th Hunger Games, Quarter Quell (Hunger Games), Careers Have Issues (Hunger Games), The Capitol (Hunger Games), This Is Not Going To Go The Way You Think, Dead Dove: Do Not Eat, Switch Tom Riddle, Switch Harry Potter

Language:
English

Series:
Part 1 of Tomarry (Hunger Games) Universe

Stats:
Published: 2024-01-25 Updated: 2025-07-10 Words: 276,343
Chapters: 39/54

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by Solitude_Aurora

Summary

Albus Dumbledore had all the stars aligning until the male tribute from District 12 for the 74th Annual Hunger Games caught the attention of his successor, Tom Riddle; but he realised too late. However, he did recognise him. Harry Potter. The son of Lily Evans-Potter and James Potter. Narrowing his eyebrows, drinking his wine with his successor beside him, he wondered what had happened for the teenage boy to end up in District 12 unlike the Capitol where he placed him. Did Sirius Black move him? How did he get to District 12 unnoticed? Was he going to win the 74th Annual Hunger Games?

Either way, he was going to have to control things before they got out of hand, in any way possible.

Note: the rape/non-con is due to the victor prostitution/ +blackmail sex as well as the torture inflicted onto one of the main characters. It never goes into detail but, the warning is there.

(Summary: Harry Potter is reaped for the 74th Annual Hunger Games but what Dumbledore doesn't know is that his successor and the male tribute grew up together in the same orphanage in the Capitol. Their love and memories are what gets the plot moving, and is what Dumbledore realises too late due to his mistakes.)

Notes

Posted: 25/1/24

The first 3 chapters are going to be the most unstable since I was winging it whilst writing it until I came up with a foundation of how I wanted this story to go. Regular updates will happen on Sundays and Wednesdays from now on. I was too excited not to post it today. So this upcoming Sunday, another post will occur, and the next Wednesday. I'm really excited about this fanfic. On the note with the rape/non-con, like I said victor prostitution,

torture for the main-c, and general sexual violence/sexual assault due to the nature of war, needing to survive, and another non-con scene with another main-c. In the Hunger Games, Katniss describes the selling of girls' bodies to the peacekeepers so I basically restate that in this. Sex is used quite on a spectrum of different kinds of affects/responses people have to it. Additionally, there is genocide that happens in this fanfic to the District 9 citizens (rebels) and Capitol citizens... and whilst it's inspired by the Poppy Wars, which is heavily inspired by the events that took place in the Second-Sino Japanese War (such as the Rape of Nanking — a mass period of wartime rape and murder committed by the Japanese Army against civilians of Nanjing, China.) I don't want to neglect what is happening in Palestine **P S**.

There is not much I can do about the issue directly - but I don't want to be speaking about things, and being neglectful, ignorant about what is happening else around the world. You don't have to donate but it's good if you can! Knowing the amount of donations AO3 gets, I feel like writing this it's not much to ask.

Here are some websites/places you could donate to if you'd like to!
Dropletsofmercy on Instagram
humanappeal on Instagram
MATW-PROJECT
Islamic Relief CA on Tiktok
Institute for Palestine Studies (non-profit) on Instagram
freepalestineland (fundraiser) on Instagram

These are just a few, please let me know your opinions on them or if there are better ones!

As you know war is brutal, and I want to be confrontational about what is inside this fanfic so nobody is left in the dark. Again, it's based around the Poppy Wars/Hunger Games so it's brutal - but I don't want to leave out the information on what's happening to Palestine and their people.

Thank you for reading this fanfic, and being educated. Enjoy.

See the end of the work for more notes

Long Story Short & Dear Reader

ACT 1

Tom Riddle gazed at the television screen with fascination. The theme song of the television program melted in his ears and he pursed his lips, glancing down at his hand. The champagne was filled half-way to the brim, Tom distracting his gaze for a mere moment, deciding to bring it to his lips. The taste of bitter nothingness hummed down his throat as he glanced back up to the screen. Beside him, on the blood-coloured couch was his adopted father, Dumbledore.

Dumbledore licked his lips of his red wine, Tom scrunching his nose at it. There was something about the way people drank different types of alcohol that irked him. Watching him take a sip of his beverage certainly did nothing to appease him. Dumbledore's eyes didn't move from the screen but Tom knew he understood he was tracking his movements. "Tom, do you have something to say?"

That. He hated that. Hated the way Dumbledore would say his name. Ever since he was younger, he said Tom as if it was a swear nobody should say. His features didn't smooth over as he debated conversing with him. In the end, he spoke frugally. "Nothing in particular, I'm just wondering about when my internship at Borgin and Burkes is going to commence is all."

"Those two victors?"

"Yes, from 3."

Dumbledore turned his head to him. Tom continued carefully, words choosen with precise calculations. "You *allow* them to work with Capitol to create entertainments for the Capitol. I applied like you suggested and I got in." Tom drank another sip of his champagne. He cleared his throat before he began to speak again. "Borgin and Burkes are well-acquainted with us, and since they'll be here for the Hunger Games as Victors; I'll be working underneath them for when the Games commence. However, when that really starts depends on when the games start."

The President of Panem gives him a sly but otherwise untouched look. Distant but understanding. He hummed, nodding at him. "After today, once all the names of the tributes are accounted for - it will only be a

week before the actual games begins. But, if you like, you can start working with them before the games commences. District 3 has seven victors. I'm sure two out of the seven can be gone for the time whilst the games happens."

"Who do you think is going to win this year?"

"We'll have to wait and see, Tom."

He scoffed. "I mean, from the percentile of all the seventy-three games so far; the estimation of what the chances of each district winning this year are."

Dumbledore gave him a stern look. "Tom, why are you asking questions you already know the answers to?"

"I'm curious is all."

"Curiousity, mhm?"

The condescending way Dumbledore talks to him makes him want to disappear. However, the advantages of having the man around - like taking his spot as President makes him bite his tongue and hum along, even if he disagrees with the answers and comments he makes. When he's president, Dumbledore is the first thing that goes; he swears to himself. Better for Panem that way; and himself, goes unsaid. "Yes, I'm curious. Perhaps I like to be enlightened on District 12's unlikeliest again this year."

"As you know, District 12 has won one out of the seventy-three games. Leaving it in last place with one point three-seven hundredths chance of winning this year." He spoke grimly about 12 like always and Tom wanted to dig up everything there was to know about his telling tone but held his tongue. The more he spoke, the less likely of a chance it was going to happen. "With twenty-two victors, District 2 has a thirty pecent chance of winning this year."

"The two 2's." Tom said fondly. "How's Lupin going to make fun of himself again this year?"

"Remus Lupin?"

"Yes, Bella is beginning to call him the howler with how he trips over constantly, drunk at each games. She finds it quite funny." Tom sighs, shrugging his shoulders. "Not much of a chance of any District 12 tribute to live whilst he's 'trying to take care of them.'"

Dumbledore stares at him with a twinkle in his eyes. Tom hates it everytime he does that.

“How are your school friends going, Tom?”

The television screen flashed to Barty Crouch Junior as he began speaking about the 74th Hunger Games introducing the concept for the year. Tom thought about Dumbledore’s question. It was awfully ridiculous. “Bella’s alright. She’s in the festive mood again this year. Dressed in all black, but Narcissa is keeping her together. Lucius has told me that his father - who particularly likes me, said that the games this year was going to be a forest scenery. Him being the head game maker and all but it’s rumoured so far of different scenarios so you don’t have to worry.” Dumbledore bowed his head slightly at him in gratitude no matter how thin it was. Tom soured but held his tongue. “Andromeda is doing her usual spiel about the inhumane the games are, but Narcissa again; is controlling that situation. The poor woman.”

Not that he actually felt any sympathy for her at all. “The Carrow Twins are all excited. Bella and Alecto were speculated the odds again, but Bella wants to spend lots of money on betting this year since she’s eighteen. Alecto is still seventeen so less luxury.”

“Tom,” Dumbledore tilted his head to the screen. “The ceremony is about to commence.”

At once, he kept his mouth shut, loathing him.

However, he did want to see the tributes. Like always, District 1 comes first. Barty Crouch Junior who was only nineteen and in his second year of his career since taking over his father, loudly speculated the names of the tributes. “And the name of the first tribute, from District 1; Persephone Ryde!”

The girl that popped up onto the screen couldn’t of been younger than sixteen. Healthy, pale, and with slim muscles - the confident teenager smirked at the camera as she was chosen. It was obvious to both Tom and Dumbledore that she trained in the secret academy Districts’ 1, 2, and 4 had. The girl was picked from the bowl of names which meant, it was pure luck she was chosen. However, nobody complained and she would be allowed to continue. Barty continued. “And the male tribute from District 1… Benedict Torres!”

At once, a single boy spoke up and volunteered. Persephone gave the boy a smirk as he walked up to the stage confidently. Barty paused

before reevaluating his original statement. “No, we have a volunteer.” He poked. “And his name is, Alistar Fenlon!” Cheers came from the audience - Barty, not only live, but infront of a real audience.

The boy had silver white hair unlike his bronze companion. His lips where thin and red, skin paler than Persephone’s. However, he had more muscle and was bigger. They were almost identical heights. Tom’s eyes navigated every little detail about the two tributes in interest. The Hunger Games was interesting, no matter the sour layers; the complexity outstanding. Tom lavished the information he got about the country from the games each year. Savouring it. Dumbledore seemed to understand this well as he hummed. “What do you think?”

“I’ll have to wait until I see all the tributes before I make my final decision.”

Dumbledore’s eyes become thinner with thought. Tom pursed his lips, taking another sip of his champagne. District 2, so far came out with the strongest competition. The boy, Valor Whitlock, was tall—an estimated six feet two, whilst his partner was five-ten. Still pretty good in terms of odds. Valor seemed lethal. Eyes blue with toxicity, teeth always shown. The boy looked hungry for murder. On the other hand, his partner was seemingly the more intelligently lethal one: Susan Bones. The girl had brown hair, lighter than Valor’s boy she had sharp eyes that flashed with understanding. If anyone was going to be a victor, it would be her, Tom could tell.

She was also muscular. Unlike District 1’s girl, Persephone, she had more mass than the five-eight girl. However, comparatively to everyone else, they were probably the most strong girls out of the lot. Tom could see the career pack unfolding immediately.

Dumbledore seemed smug when Tom turned his head to him to see him looking back at him. “Are you and your Knights of Walpurgis going to try and predict the outcome of the Hunger Games again this year?”

“I wasn’t wrong last year, was I?”

“No, but even for you; it’s a little inhumane.”

Tom said nothing at his comment. What Dumbledore didn’t like was his sadist group. Because if everyone was desensitised to the game and thought it was all an adventure to see who won and who to love, than everything of what the games stood on would be covered. But

unfortunately, he found that hard to stomach and find friends in. Fortunately, he did find friends - and they all like the little game of trying to predict the outcomes like him. Bella, not so much; she just had an enormous bloodlust (and no doubt would be a victor if in the games), Lucius was a bit sick every time the games came around (and he would die if put in the games) so not him either, Narcissa was more intuitive about the outcomes but she kept her mouth shut since one sister was addicted and the other was actively against. (She would hold her own.) Evan Rosier, who was a year younger than him like to join in on the fun. And so did Nott. They were both understandably happy to participate with his predictions - and so were considered allies.

Barty Crouch Junior was in on the predictions but kept his distance as he had to be unbiased. Alecto and Amycus were not predictors but like hearing the outcomes of what the consequences had. Lots of banter happened in the Knights of Walpurgis room, which was their main sanctuary in their high school. Nobody was allowed to come in unless previous discussions were made.

Superiority was absolute with the Knights of Walpurgis.

Dumbledore nodded his head at the District 3 tributes. “What would be the chance?”

“At what?”

“The District 3’s male tribute this year is Esteven Graves’ son, Silver. Pity.”

Silver Graves. Tall, muscular, and nonetheless the son of Esteven Graves. Tom narrowed his eyebrows with interest at the teenager. Seventeen and Graves’ son; a tragedy. Narcissa would be wailing. Tom glanced over his impressive characteristics. Pale skin, probably because he’s inside all day doing technological work, brown-rustic hair; with a plenty of freckles. He snickered. Evans would be thirsting over the teenager with Narcissa after she got over mourning his death. “Such a tradegy,” he commented. “Narcissa won’t be happy with this.”

“I can imagine. The Blacks are close with Esteven since of their gifts to him.”

“Bella won’t be gifting him anything. She’ll have her eyes set for two. However, Narcissa might try and help Silver.”

Lux Redd was the female tribute for District 3. She seemed more

technolgical than anything and really, that meant she had no chance at survival. Neither said anything whilst the next tributes came onto the screen. District 4. Barty Crouch Junior enthusiastically announced the female tribute from 4. Pearl Darley was nothing to scoff at, Tom thinks. Picked and head held strong, she walked with confidence up to the stage. Her skin was dark, burnt from sunburns, and her cheeks had a soft blush. Sunkissed from being in the sun all the time.

The boy tribute, Laurent Crawford, was nothing unusual for a male tribute of District 4. Attractive, like the female. Agile, packing more skills than muscle, but Tom found it awe-dropping what a line-up they had so far. Such an interesting group of people. There wasn't a doubt in his mind that all three career tributes were going to link-up. Six formidable opponents.

He bit his lip in eagerness.

"Thoughts, Tom?"

"Interesting."

"Of course."

To Tom, District 5 came apparent that nothing beside the main career pack would be interesting - with the strongest lot of the tributes. Their names, as irrelevant as it was going to be were, Romilda Vane and Royce Briven. By 6, Tom had his eyes only on his champagne. He turned to Dumbledore, placing his glass down. "I'll be back."

Heading to his bedroom which was down the hall, in the private mansion of the President, he went and grabbed his phone. Sitting on his bed with his back straight, he tapped the group chat that was buzzing with text messages. Narcissa was calling, and so was Bella and everyone else. To keep up appearances, he answered and joined. "Hello."

"Tom, this is so bad!" Narcissa cried out-loud. "Silver's chosen."

"Sissy, it's not so bad." Bella snickered. "We get to see him in action."

Evans murmured. "Yes."

"Keep it in your pants, Evans!" Lestrange joined the conversation. Bella laughed to his comment.

Lucius sighed, "no longer interested Tom?"

“Mhm,” he said solemnly. “After 5, everyone else is going to become dull. Maybe ten or eleven will pull something off which body mass but I won’t be surprised if nothing comes of it.” Bella laughs at his statement, Tom having to move the phone from his ear so he wouldn’t get lasting ear damage. He spoke to Nott. “Statistics?”

“So far I think 2 has the highest chance of winning. Valor seemed vicious and Susan radiated confidence and intelligence. Both have a stronger body mass than 1 and 4. But, like always 1 and 4 are tight competitors. I do think the career pack will either split or become bigger with seven this year. Silver truely adds to the competition.”

“D’you reckon he’ll win?”

“The statistics call 4 at the moment.”

“Ten?” Tom murmured. “That’s high.”

“Valour, 5. Susan, 6. Alistar, 5. Persephone, 4. Pearl, 5. Laurent, 4. If we’re talking out of twenty-four. It’s like 16 percent, but truely as I’m basing this off of just their own individual percentiles; the math doesn’t exactly adds up but who cares. It’s what I’m saying their chance of winning is based on the attributes.” Bella snickered. “Evans, 3 might be yours this year. Sorry, ‘cissa.”

Narcissa scoffed, sniffing. “You guys suck.”

“Don’t worry Narcissa. Silver won’t go down without a fight.”

“But he might die!”

“The statistics are saying it’s higher than one. That’s better than nothing.”

Alecto cleared her throat. “How is Andromeda?”

Bella huffs, Tom relaxing against his bed’s doona with gleaming interest. She was an very interest topic to speak of. “‘Romeda is pissed off like usual. She is ignoring the games tonight, but she won’t be able to hide from it forever. Sissy and I are on the couch with Ma and Pa, whilst she’s trying to take food from the fridge; listening to the names just so she knows who we are talking about when speaking of the games.”

“Bella, remind Andromeda that she is welcome to come to any meetings we have, okay?”

“I can do that, Tom!”

“Hey, President’s boy.” Evans speaks up, boldly. “Chance of an outlier district?”

“Less than 1.”

“Alright then.”

Nott scoffs. “We haven’t even seen them yet.”

“I’m certain it won’t be any higher than one.”

“How assured.” Bella said dazedly.

Tom took his phone and headed to the connected bathroom to his bedroom. It was large. Extremely so. There was two sinks which Narcissa, Bella, and occasionally Andromeda liked hanging around when doing their makeup for whichever event they were hosting at the mansion. Tom had both a bathtub and spa (but the spa was on the outside porch that was connected to his bedroom and bathtub so really, there was only an inside bathtub and shower in his bathroom.) Evans loved the spa; always, somehow, drunk whenever all of them where in it at night, during the after party of celebration - and Nott liked to read in the spa in the mornings, Tom finding him there whenever he slept over.

His bathroom was precious to him. The cleanliness of the bathroom was something he appreciated and everyone seemed to abide by his preference, the girls never leaving anything over, the boys never doing anything drastic. Tom opened up a draw and grabbed his comb, brushing his hair. It was seven o’clock in the evening and after the reaping, he was going to head to dinner with his friends to converse about the results.

Realistically, the reaping happens at twelve o’clock but no one in the Capitol is that excited in the morning and have work so they push it back to be at seven when people are settling down, about to eat dinner, and have something exciting to talk about. He returns back to the living room with his hair comb, clothes perfect, and champagne almost gone.

Dumbledore examines him. “You’re about to leave?”

“Dinner’s at eight. I’ll be out until late tonight.”

“Don’t return too late, Tom.”

He doesn’t retort, knowing whatever he decided would be his own decision. They were up to District 9; two of the children, twelve and thirteen respectively. Tom didn’t say anything but Dumbledore murmured. “How unfortunate.” Tom gave him a sharp look - knowing he had a hand in creating the games so his comment was extremely sarcastic. Even though, the empathy that seemed to be lurking in his eyes always was dimmed. The two teenagers from 10 seemed to have a higher chance at winning than the two from 9. The girl was eighteen, and the boy was sixteen. She had not a lot of muscle but from the look of her clothes, seemed to be quick. After all, 10 was lifestock. The boy, although was tall and slim, was missing an eye.

Tom knew his chances would be lowered significantly but the girl, she could even be potentially put into the career pack. Her name was Imelda Garcia.

11 was next and Tom held the phone to his ear. “10G, chances?”

Nott was on it. “Two, but that’s better than one. Not much hope for the boy though.”

“He has limbs, I’m sure he can wield them.” Bella complained.

“Sissy, he’s missing an eye!”

Tom could feel the eye roll that came from Bella directed at Narcissa. Neither said anything more. Evans grumbled. “11 doesn’t look too bad either, although the girl is young.” On the screen was the two tributes from District 11. The girl had black, textured hair, and she had dark skin. She was small, and thirteen if his estimates were to come back right but she seemed tough. Small limbs, but had the power to do things with them. Evans sighed. “He’s eighteen.”

“Lots of eighteen year-olds this year,” Nott commented with gleaming intent. “And seventeen year-olds.”

“Silver, seventeen. Alistar, seventeen. Persephone, sixteen. Valor, seventeen. Susan, eighteen. That girl Lux from 3 is fifteen which isn’t the worst but comparatively won’t make it into the career pack.” Nott read from his laptop he was surely estimated the odds on. “Laurent from 4 is eighteen. Pearl is seventeen but is going to turn eighteen during the games.”

“How on Earth did you find out that information?” Narcissa choked,

Bella laughing in the background.

“I have my sources, my dear. Tom?”

“Continue.”

“Yes, sir.” Nobody in the call battered an eye at the term, Tom finding out that from a young age - anyone who knew he was going to become the President of Panem was to treat him with the upmost respect. Nott was a power source, and Tom was going to collect all the cards that he could. He continued with his investigation. “Royce from 5 is sixteen but the girl, Romilda is only fifteen. The two from 6, McCoy and Hearst are twelve and fourteen. There is an seventeen year-old from 7 but she has anger management issues from how the reaping went so I don’t think she’ll be able to join the career pack at all. The other from 7 is twelve so… one of the largest age gaps to date for this games yet.”

“8’s girl is fifteen, 8’s boy is thirteen. 9’s girl is twelve and 9’s boy is thirteen. But we come to the real surprise. 10 might have a chance at winning. 10’s girl, Imelda is eighteen so she’s amongst the high end. Sucks for her though since next year she wouldn’t of had to participate. And 10’s boy is sixteen which is better than anything under. The eye thing sucks though.”

“And 11…” Bella draws out, almost purring. “Eighteen year-old boy, huh? Sucks for the little thirteen though.”

“He’ll protect her.” Narcissa states. “Districts like 11 stick together.”

“Oh?” Lestrange murmurs. “So sure, ‘Cissa.”

“They’re from the same District; they’d be more connected.”

“Shut up guys!” Bella screams, “12 is about to be announced.”

Nott snickers. “Nothing good ever comes from 12, Bella. And you know that.”

She did not retort back for once and Tom was eager to see 12 as Dumbledore had connections to the District. What was it about 12 that had Dumbledore so allured to it every year? He bit his lip in concentration. Barty Crouch Juniour spoke on the screen. “And for District 12’s girl tribute… Sedges Pine!” Bella hissed in excitement.

“Oh my, she’s like almost eighteen!”

“Eighteen, more like seventeen, Bella.” Nott comments.

“Still, that’s like such a better chance than all the twelves and thirteens they get every year!”

“Guys, District 12’s boy tribute. Hush.” Evans allowed no complaint as Barty spoke.

Barty took his time with the last tribute like always.

“And for the male tribute from District 12… *Harry Potter*!”

Tom fell silent.

The line fell silent as the boy from District 12 showed up on the screen.

At first, Tom couldn’t see his face. Harry’s head was faced down toward the ground and Nott gasped on the line. “He has to be about seventeen. What luck for 12 this year.” Tom’s heart stuttered as he observed the familiar, unruly hair from his childhood. It couldn’t be… but that untameable hair was recognisable. With a sun burnt, tanned complexion, the teenager slowly made his way up to the stage. He heard a ‘hurry up, boy’ from the Mayor of District 12 and Tom blinked slowly.

Turning to the camera and lifting his head slightly, all the moisture from Tom’s mouth disappeared. Dry, and chest heaving at the sight, he gaped at the screen. Emerald eyes stared at the screen with heavy hatred. The kindness of the boy, once at the orphanage was gone as he stood, reaped to be the male representative for District 12.

“No…” he spoke without thinking. Why was *he* there?

Turning to Dumbledore, the man still looked at the screen with interest. As if he couldn’t recognise him. This was his boy. The boy who Tom looked after, and the boy who kept Tom sane. This—no, this couldn’t happen. But, this was the Hunger Games. It was all about chance. Standing up, he finished what was left of his drink. He turned off the phone and its call, turning to Dumbledore. “Albus, once Borgin and Burkes arrive. I’ll start my internship immediately.”

Dumbledore turned to him. “Of course, Tom.”

Tom nodded at him before taking off.

Wearing his green thick coat that hung heavy at his neck and shoulders, he travelled to the high-end restaurant, CarMichael with little issues. His driver was a cunning man: Pyrites, who drove Tom everywhere. His salary was high because of it, but neither said anything about the scandals the other would do to create a bond of secrey. Pyrites bidded him a goodbye as he stood in front of the restaurant. Nobody batted him, the President's successor, as he walked up to the front of the restaurant. The waiters held the door for him as he entered, following the heat hostess to their private room on the top floor.

Entering last to the room, he found his seat at the end of the table. Nott was beside him and on his other side was Bella. Narcissa was beside her, and Lucius was beside her. Tom sat, glancing around at the room. The table had all twelve of their private members, with the only exception of an empty seat being at the other end of the table. It was Barty's.

Nott handed him his iPad. "Barty will arrive in twenty minutes. Late as always due to the job."

"It's alright, his job has been taken account of."

Bella laughed. "I'm totally betting on pretty girl, Imelda from 10."

"Not 11, Bella?" Lestrange smirked at her direction; as if his crush wasn't obvious. "Rex seemed like the obvious option for you."

She rolled her eyes, holding up her glass of red wine at him. "It would've but no, I think my girl, Imelda is going to have a lot more interest this year for me." She put a hand on Narcissa's shoulder. "My poor Sissy is probably going to be hung up on trying to save Silver this year, but I think either the career pack or Imelda is going to win."

"I place my bets on Susan." Nott states. "She's clever, I can tell."

Alecto rolls her eyes. "But 2 always holds the most promise. I think Pearl might win."

Tom paused when his eyes found themselves planted on District 12's male tribute: Harry Potter. With the picture Nott had collected of each tribute, he could see it clearly now. The nine year-old boy, Harry had been when Tom had left the orphanage. Dressed in polished, cream clothes, with the only speck of colour being the scarf Tom gifted him for his ninth birthday. His jade scarf. Which Harry always wore with the exception of summer. Now, he wore hardly what he wore at the

orphanage. Ratty, tattered clothes: scars across his arms and legs. Skin worn and with noticeable marks of skin trauma from the sun. Tom couldn't move his eyes from him. His boy, the boy who took care of him - and Tom him; how could this be? How could this happen?

Tom blinked and drank the champagne he was given leisurely. Not wanting to rush, wanting to think over his thoughts on the situation. Harry Potter. Tom never knew his name. All he knew was those eyes, his curly hair, his soft touch. He narrowed his eyebrows.

Bella snapped him out of it. "Tom, who do you think will win this year?"

Normally his answer would be immediate, this time he was silent.

Evans snickered. "Hard for you to predict this year?"

"No," he shook his head. With all the information they had gathered so far, either Susan Bones from 2 would win; or Silver from 3; or Imelda from 10; or Rex from 11. Those were the main 4 options of who would win that his companions saw. But Tom wanted Harry to win - he wasn't supposed to be in the games; he was a Capitol Citizen. He shouldn't be in the Districts, nonetheless District 12. Not in those clothes, not skinny, and certainly not as if he saw death.

The orphanless boy of his childhood was about to go through the Hunger Games, a system Dumbledore set-up, and Tom was about to watch him die without an inch of assistance. He gulped. He couldn't. Couldn't watch him die; couldn't let this be the end for him. Not Harry.

He narrowed his eyebrows, thinking. It was a terrible thing whenever he thought - because nobody else could keep up. He turned to Nott. "I'm incredibly bored. This year, the games will have a large career pack and strong teenagers that will set the games apart. Unfortunately, either the games will progress for a long time or a quick bloodbath will reduce them to nothing will come of this year. Lucius, your father, Senior; he knows the ins-and-outs of the Games, correct?"

"He is a Game Maker this year."

"Mhm…" Tom begins to think to himself. "How many victors know the President?"

"All, you'd presume."

“And me?”

“Anyone who matters.” Nott replies for Lucius.

Tom concocts a scenario that he realistically imagines that all his knowledge would fit into. Everyone is silent whilst he tells them what he is thinking about. “Being behind the scenes is something I’m already going to do this year with Borgin and Burkes since I’ve got my internship with them, but I think connecting with the victors would be interesting. Does anyone have any particular victors in mind?”

“Cedric Diggory from District 4,” Evans says immediately. “Could you get me an autograph?”

“Yes,” Nott agrees. “Cedric Diggory won only a few years ago. He’s beloved by the Capitol. Getting an in with him could be a clever idea.”

Nott began to write down on his laptop, names of various victors who would be good to connect with. Tom felt a plan concocting already. His chest still felt heavy and tight but with this plan, he began to feel more relaxed. In control. Bella snickers. “If you can, you should totally try and talk to Silver for Sissy.”

“Could you Tom?” Narcissa speaks up. “I really want to wish him well.”

“I could try, Narcissa, but I’m not sure if I’ll be allowed to speak with the tributes.”

“I’m sure you could.” Bella shakes her head, taking a sip of her wine. “You’re beloved by everyone too - you certainly could talk to them if you so dared. I reckon you should definitely talk with them.” Tom gave her a glance of interest. They recommended he should talk to the tributes but to be able to, would seem like cheating. He wondered how he could talk to them; him, without sparking conflict. Indirect contact, then… notes? Maybe.

Evans grumbled. “Which victors are coming this year?”

“A lot,” Nott explains. “The 3rd Quarter Quell is next year.”

“Attendance isn’t mandatory but it is for whatever challenge is coming next year, regardless of the new input of the challenge.” Tom puts the iPad down and grabs his wine to take a sip. “It’s always mandatory for the Quarter Quell unless someone is near dead.”

Evans leans on the table. “You really should converse with the beloved victors. They’d love you.”

“Mhm… who should I start with first?”

“Borgin and Burkes, obviously?” Nott rose his eyebrows. “They’ll be the ones your with first so you should be able to converse with them and ask about other victors. Ask their opinions. If not, go off on your own. I’m sure that won’t be an issues, Mr. President.”

Bella snapped at him. “He’s not the president yet, Nott. Don’t say that, you know Tom doesn’t like it.”

“But he does have restricted access passes literally everywhere.”

Tom doesn’t say anything more. He looks back down at the iPad at Harry. If he was somehow able to converse with the tributes, converse with Harry - maybe he has a chance at winning. The deadbeat, Remus Lupin won’t be able to do much for Harry or the girl, Sedge. He bites his inner-cheek. Notes. He should definitely start with notes and appearances.

Bella sighs at her phone, holding it up to show Narcissa. “Andromeda’s losing the plot again.”

“Seriously, if the girl wants to be one of them: she should just go.” Lestrange tells them.

Narcissa glares at Lestrange. “Shut up, Lestrange. Just because Andromeda’s compassionate, doesn’t mean she needs to be banished to such a fate. She’s just misguided is all. Our parents are thinking about sending her to the Ladies College because she thinks her boyfriend, Ted is being a bad influence.”

“Ladies College.” Alecto whistles. “She’s up shits-creek.”

“Honestly,” Bella rolls her eyes. “Lestrange, keep your tongue trained.”

Lestrange bashfully flushes at the comment, Bella winking at him and smirking before turning her gaze back to him. Tom tries to calculate what he is to do next, Nott speaking up. “Are you thinking about returning back to the President’s tonight or come out of the den and partying with us?” Bella raises her glass with intent, and Narcissa sighs, but smiles softly - Lucius ready to do anything Narcissa was going to do, and Lestrange the same. Evans gave Tom a weighted look

and the Carrow Twins both smirked with interest.

Barty would no doubt come and get pissed at any chance so… Tom came a conclusion. “Alright.”

It only meant he wouldn’t have to return until late tomorrow if he did.

Standing up and taking his arm, Bella began to speak to him about the newest addition to their group, this teenager - only fifteen called Regulus Black. Apparently, the Black girls’ cousin was interested in joining and was in the elite group of the middle school they all went to before their high school. Now that he was old enough was thinking about joining. Tom had no disregard, knowing the Black brothers somewhat of a mystery. No one knows what happened to the eldest brother, Sirius, but the youngest, Regulus was still apart of the lineage that was the Blacks.

Everyone followed behind them both, all cramming together in the elevator as they went down. Once they were all down and on the streets with their glasses of wine and champagne, they ran into Barty as he got out of his car. “Tom! Bella! Narcissa!” He ran up and gave Bella a side hug and kiss before bowing his head at him. “Tom, how are the results coming along?”

“All fine.” Nott answers for him. “He’s thinking about mingling with the tributes and victors this year, can you believe?”

Barty laughs and kisses Narcissa on the cheeks who is beside Lucius, before handshaking Nott. “Of course I can believe. I asked him last year if that was something he wanted to do with me but he turned me down.” Tom gave him a sharp look. He knew the reason why he didn’t want to do that with him last year. He got into an incident at school that almost killed a girl so he wanted to stay on the downlow so Dumbledore wouldn’t say anything more about his situation, and revoke his privileges. “Regardless, I’m really glad for a behind man this year if that’s the case Tom.”
“He’s interested in the tributes this year.” Evans supplied.

“Why not? With a career pack so large, who wouldn’t be?”

Tom walked with Bella, ignoring the boastful man behind them, Bella clinging onto him with great comfort. She was wearing a black dress that went down to her ankles, with black high-heels on, and a blood-red necklace she received from her mother on her thirteen birthday.
“So Bella.” Tom began. “You and Lestrange?”

“Courted but not yet married. You know how my parents are.”

“I do. And Narcissa?”

“Lucius isn’t a bad match - being her boyfriend and all, but I wonder when they’re going to tie the knot. Sissy isn’t very adamant on marrying yet since she got a scholarship to go to Grimaldi’s University for medicine. You were thinking about going to Grimaldi’s as well. How is that coming along?” Tom thought about her question briefly.

“Grimaldi’s has already accepted me as a student for next year.” He tells her. “And you?”

“I was thinking about Grimaldi but also Laver’s.”

“As long as it’s not Ladies, you’ll be fine, Bella.”

She laughs with both sadness and sadism. “Andromeda. Poor Sissy. What a girl, no?”

“Interesting, yes.”

They make their way to the club, Vos, reknown for the best entertainment and luxurious drinks of all Panem. Outside, the line was ginormous and some of the citizens won’t be able to get in until the morning, but because of his Presidency-to-be card, he gets in anywhere. As a result of that, his friends get in alongside him. The superiority of the Capitol, he likes to reminisce. Bella winks and blows a kiss at the line, walking in with Tom, everyone behind them following along. The bouncers keeping everyone out as Tom walked in with his lot.

Inside was all vomit material to Tom.

Fire displays, watercoloured-stained drinks, red carpet, warm and cold air conditioners, neon lights, noise that exceeded the healthy hearing range, and nauseous acts of people kissing, getting sexual, and fucking all around them. It’s sort of like a club but since it’s the Capitol, it’s certainly got the motto “do whatever you like - we don’t kiss and tell.” The secrey of the club was telling since everyone forgets what happened in the morning unless you don’t drink: the secrey was in the drinks, so powerful the memories of the night fades but Tom has access to the actual drinks that doesn't make him and his friends forget. Although, sometimes he doesn’t tell his friends which are spiked and what aren’t so he can retain information whilst they forget.

He goes upstairs, Bella laughing at some of the sexual-preformed acts on the way. “Gosh, it’s so refreshing.”

“What is, Bella?”

“The freeness of the club: you wouldn’t get this anywhere else.”

He supposes not, but he likes the upstairs since there is less sex all around. Occasionally there is some, and for some gag jokes, Evans or Lucius or Barty, like to buy people to preform for them but besides that; there is less reason to vomit upstairs. And it’s quieter. Much. Tom likes it quiet. He hears better. Today, Barty stayed downstairs with the Carrow Twins whilst Nott, Tom, Bella, Lucius and Narcissa got settled in their usual spot. Lestrange went to go grab them drinks (that weren’t spiked) and Bella rested her head on his shoulder.

As much as he hates touch, Bella’s okay. She keeps all the other women away and they know each other enough not to do anything he doesn’t, or she doesn’t like. And besides, Tom has known about her crush on him ever since he met the girl in their primary grade - but confessed he wasn’t all about that. Ever since, they’ve been close but never closer. They don’t need to be.

And with Lestrange now in the picture, it won’t be any different, he doesn’t think.

Lestrange knows the complexity of their relationship. He won’t do anything to change it because he knows Tom gets the luxury of less women when Bella’s around, and Lestrange doesn’t have to worry about Bella mingling with any of the other guys if she’s around him. Their trust is woven through the complexity of their wants and needs: and nobody will say anything different, not if Tom has a say about it.

Evans sits beside him, eyeing Tom with interest.

What is there to say about Evans?

There was the known fact he was all about Tom as much as Nott was. Whilst Nott was intelligent with the way he gained Tom’s attention, Evans was less pushy about it. Lingering stares, soft touches: it was all about “make your move” with the two of them. Neither have done anything, but Tom knows Evans wants him. However, Evans wants Tom to say something about it. He hasn’t. And he doesn’t think he ever will. Whilst Tom does find Evans conveniently attractive, he doesn’t have the need to speak upon his feelings because there are none. Evans would break at the thought. As a result, no movement.

Bella watches Evans like a snake for Tom. If she's all over him, Evans won't say anything. Nott won't say anything. Narcissa will only laugh with interest. And Lucius, the seemingly only intelligent male amongst them will keep his distance. The Carrows weren't of anything special to Tom and they understood that so nothing came of them, but Barty…
He was an interesting case.

Barty liked everyone and anyone: didn't matter who it was: where they came from, he was a sexual beast. After confronting Tom again and again, they've come to a standstill but Tom knows it won't stop Barty from asking again - but all they know is that he's particular with his tastes. What they don't know is that he finds it repulsive. However, if they know he's never had sex in his life before - they'd find him to be a… well, a virigin, and that's awful to think about: but actually having sex is worst in his opinion. Maybe Bella, she'll probably understand but…

He crinkled his nose in disgust.

Lestrange returned with the glasses along with a hostess who placed them in front of them. "Drink up guys!" He took a glass, and another, passing that one to Bella as she leeched off from Tom's shoulder. He kissed her cheek and Tom watched, before taking a glass of his own. It looked like a regular shot but something about the blue neon colour spooked him. Something about the artificialness of the drink irked him but he spoke no complaint as he held it in the air. Barty rushed up the stairs, grabbed one of the shots and cheering: "to the 74th Hunger Games!"

"May the odds be ever in your favour," the table - and other tables around them that had a lot of other guests cheered, all in excitement for the games. Tom spoke quietly, not needing to be loud for the message to get across. He gulped down the repulsive drink, Bella choking beside him. "Gosh," she blurted out. "That's awful!"

"How amazing," Barty laughed, ditching them again - the Carrow Twins watching in amazement as the announcer ran back down the stairs where they came up from. Tom blinked, realising what Barty had been wearing. He flushed and scrunched up his nose, repulsed.

Evans bursted out cackling at his reaction. "Tom, seriously? How are you surprised?"

"He's an announcer, he should at least have some sane attributes

about him."

Bella connected back with Tom, Evans scowling instantly whilst she answered for Evans. "Barty is a sexual creature. Just leave him and his ability to reproduce alone." Tom rolled his eyes, taking another drink and scoffing it down. He wanted to forgot that sight before the night was over, for sure. Lestrange snickered and Narcissa laughed.

"So," Lucius speaks up. "The Games. Excited for you involvement, Tom?"

"I suppose so. I just have to find a way to mingle without the President catching a hold that's what I'm doing."

"Oh, did Daddy not—"

Tom threw the glass in his hands at Evans, missing him by an inch as it crashed behind him. Evans stared at him bewildered, Narcissa saying nothing of the incident and giving Evans fond eyes whilst Lucius gaped at the attempt of assault. Bella laughed, crying into his coat. Lestrange spoke of nothing and Nott only had his mouth opened like a goldfish. "Shut up, Evans."

He stood up, releasing Bella from his hold before retreating back down stairs with a glass in his hand. Good luck trying to remember the night when their privilege for a lack of non-spiked drinks is revoked. Tom heads down, trying to avoid Barty - gaping when he sees him on a table, involved in such lewd acts it makes Tom want to vomit and rip his heart out. He pauses for a moment, watching, and flinches when something touches his arm.

"Tom," he hears Evans. He turns and glares at him.

"Evans. Leave."

"Tom, I—I just wanted to apologise."

Tom didn't say anything, glancing back at Barty, repulsed and moved through the crowd as Evans followed him. He held his forearm and Tom said nothing about it as he found his way out the front door. People began to chatter about him in the line, and Tom and Evans left down the street. Tom's legs moved him away from the club, no longer wanting to be repulsed by the sight as he sat down at a bench in the park. Parties were happening all around but at least no sex was happening in such a public place. Children raced around and Evans sat next to him.

Evans sighed, touching his upper arm again. “I’m really sorry, Tom. I know you don’t like Dumbledore.”

“Why be such a bug then?” He asked, glaring at him. “Why taunt me?”

He’s going to release a beast if he continues.

Evans says nothing.

“I don’t know. I’m just sorry.”

Tom stands up. “Don’t follow me.”

Evans is about to say something else before Tom takes off, not looking back. His pace was a little quicker than usual but nothing more than his usual walking speed but the intent of getting back was more extreme. He found himself in the garden, walking around the mansion to distract himself, the guards letting him in as he relaxed away from everyone else. Harry. He was going to meet Harry after nine years. Tom’s gut turned; and he vomited by the thought - or possibly by the drinks in his system. How was he going to do this?

End Game

Chapter Summary

Tom meets Harry.

Chapter Notes

Posted: 28th of January, 2024 - Sunday
With Palestine **P S**

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Waking up in the gardens wasn't an abnormal occurrence for Tom. However, ending up semi-naked, watching as Severus Snape picked ingredients from the bushes was not normal. The adult, only a few years older than Tom, kept his focus on his pickings as Tom sat up from the ground. "Did Dumbledore ask you to come collect me or something?" He said harshly. Severus Snape, there wasn't much to say about him other than that Tom didn't like him. Snape was like Dumbledore's apprentice and he would do absolutely anything the man would say. Everything opposite that Tom was. Why he wasn't becoming the president was beyond him but he didn't care; the man was so pathetic he couldn't do a speech so he supposed Dumbledore needed someone with more of a backbone than him.

Snape observed him for a mere moment. "Had fun last night?"

"Not really," Tom grumbled. "Just the usual disasters."

The man grunted before standing up with his basket, manoeuvring himself so he could help up Tom from the ground. Snape scrunched his nose at Tom. "You're covered in vomit. Must you vomit every time you drink?"

"Dumbledore's out, yet?" Tom asked instead of retorting.

"Yes, but he's asked that I hold down the fort."

"Ah," Tom rolled his eyes. "Such a responsibility."

"That means you, Tom Riddle."

Tom said nothing, only allowing himself to be dragged back into the mansion by Snape as he scowled at his foul smell. Tom wasn't about

to complain, smelling his awful odour as he was basically pushed into the bathtub of his bedroom. Snape stood there, observing him for a mere moment before stating: “I’ll get Jules to look over you. He’ll be here soon alongside Francisca.” Leaving him alone, still covered in puke and still semi-naked, he peeled himself of his sweaty clothes. He turned the television of the bathtub on to hear the latest news and turned the bath on. Glancing at himself in the mirror, he cringed, looking repulsed by himself.

He sat down in the bathtub, allowing the burning temperatures to fuel his rage as Jules and Francisca entered. Jules; the Capitol’s best designer and Francisa; the Capitol’s best make-up artist, both were under the rule of the Capitol’s manipulation. Jules wore heavy false eyelashes, red with black tips, and heavy rustic ware laughed as he entered the bathroom. “Tom!” He cheered. “What mess have you got yourself into this time?”

Tom didn’t reply, allowing the man to enter alongside his companion, Francisa, who loved purple. Everything about the woman screamed purple. Purple clothes, dyed hair which was more lavender than purple - dyed purple skin, and her acrylics were all purple. His designers were exaggerated schemes to distract the Capitol of the horrors of the games. The pure addiction. Tom let Jules touch him, pouring substances in his hair to wash it.

Jules turned to Francisa. “Dear, get me some water and medicine.”

“Alright, I’ll be back in a minute, dear.”

Dear; such an annoying term of endearment. He says it because everyone else says it but the use of endearments always gets to him. They’re like children, the adults of the Capitol. Mindless children who don’t know any better. About him. About what he thinks. They think that he’s like them. Dumbledore thinks he’s exactly like them and that he’s going to be able to fit the piece of what everything it means to be President. Tom feels nauseous again, Jules gripping his hair and directing his mouth over the bathtub and to the toilet as he heaves up pure stomach acids.

“It’s alright, Tom. You’ll be okay, sweetheart.” “How long have—have you guys been here for?”

“Since early this morning.” Jules explains, massaging his hair gently with the studs. “Dumbledore thought it would be a good idea to be here if you weren’t returning until late.” Tom grumbles something

underneath his breath, but his pounding headache makes him think it was only a curse towards Dumbledore. The very sick man. Manipulative and cunning, everything Tom wants to be, but at the same time - disgusted by. These methods were impractical. Tom can think of many ways that he can change the Games and make the method of manipulation much more effective but the man won't take any of his suggestions. He's surprised he's been allowed to be so close to the games this year with Borgin and Burkes.

As long as Dumbledore doesn't know he's going to be mingling a lot more than he anticipated, all will be well. Jules kisses his forehead. "Oh dear, you're such a mess: the night didn't go well?"

"Evans, again."

"Ah, that stupid boy." Jules shakes his head. "He should know you're not into that sort."

Tom froze at the comment before looking up.

The Capitol and sexuality is an interesting combination of complexity. Since Dumbledore eradicated the discussions of God (or Gods), there has been nothing against sexuality. Anyone is allowed to do anything with another person. However, there still is the notion that for a child, a male and female have to get together to make one blossom - which isn't so much of an issue but when it comes to Jules, he's forward with his opinions. He loves children. And when it comes with Tom, he wants him to have a female partner. He wants to see Tom's children and cater for them as he does with himself. Tom doesn't think during the nine years that he's known Jules that he's ever had a partner. See, unlike Jules, Francisa has dated aplenty. Men, women, and people in-between. It doesn't matter to her. But it gets him when people try to make decisions for him, for himself. Tom keeps his thoughts to himself; Jules is old. Around forty to fifty, he speculates.

Dumbledore is around seventy, but he thinks Jules is mad over the fact Dumbledore never had kids - the President - so he wants Tom to have kids so he gets to see them grow up since they're babies. Tom knits his eyebrows together, looking up at Jules, bothered.

He is such a child himself, it's no wonder he wants another child companion to be around because Tom's too smart for him. Snape, despite how much Tom dislikes him, is too smart for Jules. They both have outgrown the Capitol's sweethearts. They've got roles they have to fill and Jules, and his opinions are only going to annoy him more,

he understands.

Francisca returns with water and medicines for him.

She turns to Jules. “Penny is calling for you, you might want to leave.”

Penny - that girl, Tom glares, thank fuck.

Jules says nothing more, only biding Tom a goodbye before Francisca sits where Jules was sitting. “What did he say to you this time that got you so angsty, Tom?” He said nothing, only allowed the honey water to go down his throat with the medicines that Francisca grabbed for him. He scrunched up his nose as he absorbed the ingredients, Francisca patting his head.

“It’s okay, Tom. Roll over for me.”

His back was turned to Francisca as she scrubbed it. “You’ve been covered in dirt, you poor boy.” She tsked. “Excited for the games?”

“Very…” he murmured, unenthused.

“That’s great!”

On the television screen, he turned on, Barty was back on the screen. Tom blinked, before narrowing his eyes and scrunching up his nose at the thought of what he wore last night. Francisca laughed at him, able to tell something was up as she scrubbed his back. “Barty did something ridiculous again, did he?”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if he had over a hundred children before thirty.”

Francisca barked out laughing, nodding along. Tom listened to what he had to say. District 1, 2, 9, 8, 11, 5, and 10, had all made it to the Capitol. 3, 4, 6, 7, and 12 hadn’t made it to the Capitol as of yet. That meant he couldn’t start with Borgin and Burkes yet and infiltrate the tributes centre. However, tonight would be the opening ceremony where he would have to be with Dumbledore, so… he pursed his lips. “Has the President got you two here for my perfection today?”

The woman hums. “Yes, he wants you to look magnificent.”

“Do I have to sit beside him tonight? - I really don’t want to.”

“I’m not sure you have a choice, sweetheart.”

Tom doesn't say anything after that about it, listening to Barty. "District 1 and 2 surely do seem to be polite if their welcoming to the Capitol was anything to go by!" He cheers, the crowd loving him. How does he have such energy? Tom watches him, bothered by his presence. "Anyhow, Capitol, how are we thinking about the tributes this year? Excited, upset, dazzled, petrified? I feel them all too!" The audience laughed alongside Barty. "The victors are also to make an appearance; so make sure you say hello if they pass alright!"

He leaned forward, relaxing his head against the bathtub. "Who do you want to win this year, Tom?"

"Would it be bad if I wanted to say, 12?"

"No, you told us you wanted 11 to win when you were fourteen."

"4 won that year though."

Francisca fondly hummed. "Yes, but just because someone is more likely to win doesn't mean you can't have your favourites. So, 12? The girl or the boy? They're both very pretty this year. I think Bonavich and Morgan are going to receive them this year." Tom blinked at the comment before turning to Francisca.

"Like the Peacekeeper uniform designers?"

"Yes, they're very skilled at designing outfits - Dumbledore wanted them for 12 this year."

"And you know them?"

"Very well, they helped Jules and I design the trends last year."

Tom locks that information away, leaning against the bathtub. "Well… how hard would it be if I were to pose as a designer tonight?" Francisca blinks, pursing her purple-coloured lips with interest. She says, "what do you mean, Tom? - Like you want to meet the tributes?" Francisca flushes, before turning her head toward the television. "I think I could potentially convince them that you want to talk to one of the tributes, by posing as one of them, but what is the tribute going to think, Tom? - Dumbledore might think you're giving them an unfair advantage." Francisca winks, "but even if you were going to do that - I wouldn't tell. I swear." She laughs.

He thinks. "It's alright. If you can't, you can't. I was just wondering about it."

Francisca thinks, purple lashes fluttering. “Tom, don’t say that. I’m quite sure it will be alright.”

Tom’s stomach clenched with an uneasy feeling overcoming him.

Harry—*Harry* hasn’t seen him since the orphanage. Unless he saw him on the television beside Snow, or amongst the superiors of Panem but; Tom hasn’t seen Harry since that fateful day in the orphanage. Where he left without a word. What happened to Harry? Why is he in District 12? Why was he picked as tribute? - all these questions rattle him.

He glances up to Francisca, decision made.

“I would like to see him, so… could you please do everything in your power for that to happen?”

Harry, no doubt in Tom’s mind, would see him up beside Dumbledore. He needs to explain what happened whilst he was gone so he doesn’t frighten him away. To convince him that he’s someone he can trust whilst he’s in the games. His heart fluttered at the thought before Tom, mortified, flushed at the feeling. Biting his bottom lip, Francisca brought a soft hand up to his hair. He glanced up to see the purple conditioner she put into his hair. “To make it soft.”

He hummed, glancing back down as she massaged it into his head.

“Bonavich has Sedge this year and Morgan has Harry. If you want Harry, I’ll be happy to converse with Morgan about allowing a time for you two to meet.” Tom thanks Francisca and she washes his hair before grabbing him a towel and wrapping him up in it. No longer needing the help of anyone, she kisses his cheek and leaves him alone.

The woman tells him to check his messages and that she’ll text him the location she’ll have for him to meet up with Morgan that night. But that straight away afterwards, he’ll have to meet her so she can fix him up for his clothes for the night. Wet, still in the towel, he relaxed on his bed - scrolling on his phone. Bella sent a photo of what she was going to wear for the night, a dark gothic black dress with frills and Narcissa sent a photo of her hangover self, in bed with Lucius beside her, asleep. Both without clothes on. Tom scrunches up his nose at the implication but accepts it was bound to happen. Narcissa text: ‘it’s 9 in the morning. Go to bed, Sissy.’

And Bella texted back: ‘just because I drank less than you doesn’t mean I’m that exhausted to need pointless sleep. Tom?’

He didn't want to text her that he was nude in his bed, wet as a poor street urchin, so he kept silent about his condition. He sent a slim message: 'go to bed anyway, Bella.'

'See even Tom agrees with me.'

'Such up, Sissy!'

'Shut the fuck up you two!' Nott sent to the group chat. 'You're dinging my phone.'

Tom turned the noise off and rolled over. He felt so awful.

By noon, a bang woke up Tom and he was mortified to find Snape back in his room to find him fully nude again. "Can't you fucking knock?" He asks, glaring at him. Snape widens his eyes, not expecting to see him in such a state, the adult gulping. He blinks for a minute before turning around. Tom laughs, leaning back into the bed, relaxing. He was such a virgin. Snape murmurs, "do you have to enjoy being naked at every chance you can?"

"I don't enjoy it. You just happen to find me at my most vulnerable, always, it seems."

"Yes, drunk and unconscious in a garden. And asleep, nude in your bed. How vulnerable of places."

"What do you want?"

"Dumbledore wants you."

"What?" He sits up in a flash. He glanced down at himself. He's in no condition to leave his room.

Snape cleared his throat, "you heard me."

Tom jumps out of bed, basically crashing to the ground as he stammers to put clothes on. Snape sighs, shaking his head. "It's nothing major, Tom. All he wants you to do is have lunch with him to discuss some issues. Just put a robe on and we'll be on our way." Tom freaked. That meant something and he couldn't just show up in his green robes.

"Like fuck I am." "

So crass, you've never been this disorganised, Tom."

Tom scoffs, tugging on underwear and a shirt, Snape heading over towards the door to leave. He swears once he's out of the door, Tom grabbing pants - and a tie, tugging his pants on as he makes his way to the door. On his way, he grabs a pair of socks, and shoes - slinging his tie on his shoulder as he rushfully follows Snape down the hallway.

It takes five minutes to get to the dining room and by the time Tom makes it there, Dumbledore is smug - observing him. "How was your night, Tom?"

"Fine, a pleasure for you to ask."

He sits down on the opposite end of the table, Snape sitting in-between them. Dumbledore keeps quiet for a moment before speaking on behalf of what Snape dragged him down to him to hear. "I heard from Borgin and Burkes that they're unable to attend." Tom blinked, mouth opening ever so slightly at the news. They weren't—they weren't doing what? Not coming. Why on—

"Borgin and Burkes happen to get in an epidemic whilst down at 3. Silver and Lux are fine as it stands but since they were at the wrong place at the wrong time, they won't be able to attend. And as a result, your internship."

"Couldn't I do—"

"No, Tom. I'm sorry, but your internship will have to wait until next year."

Fuck that, he didn't have time for next year.

Standing up, he marched out of the dining room without touching a speck of his food, hurrying back to his bedroom. Grabbing his phone, he dialled Francisca. When she answered, he rushed his statement. "How long will I be able to speak with Harry for, do you know?" The woman seemed to be having a conversation whilst multitasking and speaking to him. She said, "Tom?" He harshly breathed. "I'll be able to get you in with Morgan by four. But you won't be able to speak with him until five thirty."

"It's twelve, Francisca."

"And you want to leave the mansion?"

"Very much so."

“Okay, mhm…” she thinks. “What about you greet him then?”

“Who?—*Harry*?”

“Both Harry and Sedge. I’m sure they’ll like to know what your edge on things is seeing as you’ll be hanging around him a lot, won’t you?” Francisca mentions cunningly. “I’ll be at your mansion by one. Make sure you're dressed, child.”

Dressing in his most appropriate clothes he could think of, he found himself stunned by the lack of wear he seemed to have. No, he couldn’t wear this. And no, he couldn’t wear that. He was having a mental breakdown over his lack of clothes, throwing things around until he found what Tom thinks is the most appropriate thing he could wear. Gold.

A black coat with golden accents, he wore a green (emerald) shirt that he’s sure Francisca would compliment him for despite her love of purple, and designer black pants alongside his leather boots. He found himself staring at himself in the mirror, worrying about his hair by the time Francisca called him again. He answered but still worked on his hair in the mirror. “Sweetheart, are you ready? I’m outside.”

“I’m almost done, France. Just wait a moment.”

He was outside by the time his hair was done, going the hidden way so Dumbledore wouldn’t be able to discover he had left the property. He got into the car, Francisca eyeing him up and down. “Looking good, Riddle.” She whistled and began to drive them towards the train station where the tributes were to come out of. “Now, I would like you to meet—“

Tom turned his head and almost screamed in shock. Both Morgan and Bonavich were in the back of the car. “What are you two doing here?"

“I thought we could get introductions over and down with quickly since today will be a big day.” Francisca explains hurriedly. “Tom,” she looks at him happily. “This is Morgan vi Leon and Bonavich Madison. Morgan, Bonavich; Tom Riddle. To-be President.”

“It’s an honour, Mr. Riddle.” Bonavich shakes his extended hand.

“Yes,” he hisses hesitantly. He turns to Morgan. “You too, Ms. vi Leon.”

She shakes his hand with curiosity, kissing his cheek as she was closer.

“I heard from a little birdy, you wanted to speak to my tribute.” He hums. Morgan laughed. “I know Harry’s quite the charmer but I didn’t imagine that he would capture the attention of the President’s successor?” Tom says nothing about the reason why he wants to meet Harry, only agreeing.

“It’s alright, Tommy.” Bonavich replies. “We’ll make sure he looks dazzling tonight.”

“Aren’t I meeting him?”

“Yes, but we understand your desire; and the Capitol’s to make our tributes look splendid. It will be of note to make sure you checkout what the tributes are going to wear.” Tom has to ask them, “they’re not going to be naked, are they?” Morgan laughs, shaking her head frantically. “Of course not. We’re going to make it so they shine brightly. Or… you want to see them nude, Mr. Riddle?”

“No, it’s okay.” He says with the utmost confidence he can muster in that moment.

Bonavich laughs, Morgan eyeing him, pleased. Tom turns his head to find them entering the train station. “Okay,” Bonavich replies. “This is what is going to happen. Mr. Riddle, we are not getting out because we don’t want to seem suspicious now do we?” He nods along and listens. “So we’re actually going to put you in the car that takes them to the training centre.”

“But how am I going to be able to speak to Harry without Sedge—“

“Because,” Morgan laughs. “Male and female tributes from the same district take two different cars.” Bonavich adds, “it’s because separating them leads to us having an easier time getting them to undress. We’ve conversed with Mr. Lupin on the phone about some things and anyone will be able to travel with them.”

“Meaning Harry will be alone?”

“Precisely,” Francisca grins with her teeth. “Happy, lover-boy?”

“You guys are the best designers I’ve ever met.” He decides to compliment them. It’ll only lead to them being allies with him if he does; showering them with flattery is, of course, one of the best ways to manipulate someone to do your bidding for you. Morgan blows a kiss at him. Bonavich grabbing out a flask. Morgan turns to Bonavich, “don’t drink now. It’s so early.”

Francisca grumbles. “He’s an addict Morgan, good like trying to stop him.”

“Do y’know Lupin?”

“Yes,” Tom answers for the two girls.

“Do you think he’ll give me alcohol recommendations?”

Morgan rolled her eyes, “with the way you’re going, maybe. Stop. You can’t be blasted when you meet Sedge. The girl seems feisty. She isn’t going to want a drunk designer on top of a drunk mentor, y’know.”

“Poor girl,” Tom says without a care.

Francisca begins to slow down as they enter the carpark of the train station. The amount of people there was astounding and Francisca pulled up to where the two Peacekeeper trucks were. It seemed a little inhumane putting the tributes into the cars but for safety reasons, it made sense. Especially after the year a tribute tried to cannibalise some of the Capitol and tributes whilst they were in the games. Francisca pulled over and Morgan got out alongside Tom.

The two peacekeepers that were in front of the car watched him with curiosity. “This is who we were telling you about. The President’s successor, Tom Riddle. He’s allowed access to the tributes and would like to be placed in the car with Harry Potter.” Morgan told the peacekeepers.

They gave each other a glance before nodding and allowing him inside of one of the trucks. Tom hopped inside and found himself sitting on the luxuriously cushioned couch - as the door was shut behind him. Raising his eyebrows at the golden light that felt more red than gold, he waited. He glanced at his phone, watching the messages of his friends pass by to wait out the time, and ask for an update on the District 12 tributes’ arrival. Nott told him ten minutes. So he waited.

And waited, and *waited*.

It felt a lot longer than ten minutes when he heard rustling come from behind the door. He paused, knowing it was about time he reunited with Harry Potter; the boy of his childhood. The door opened with a creak and Tom turned to face the boy. Pushed inside, he watched as Harry went flying to the ground, on his hands and knees as the door was shut behind him. Tom gaped, and went forward to help him.

“Harry?”

Harry didn’t look up. If Tom wasn’t so sure about being in the same car as Harry Potter, he wouldn’t have thought it was Harry that was on the ground. His height was stunted, and he was slim. So very slim. Tom went toward him, and carefully touched his shoulders. He felt his heart stop as he felt Harry fall completely into him when the truck (car-thing) began to move. Tom went flying backward with Harry in toe - Tom wrapping his arms around him. Harry shook and trembled, Tom gritted his teeth when he was pressed against the front of the cold metal of the truck. “Harry,” Tom began again. “Are you alright?”

“W-w-who—“ Harry slowly glanced up to him, when his eyes widened.

With surprise, hope, and fear.

He turned his gaze back to Tom’s chest, hiding in his arms as Tom wrapped his arms around him stronger. “It’s Tom, Harry. From the orphanage. Are you alright?”

Silence was what followed.

“Y-you left.”

“I’m Dumbledore’s successor now.”

“The President’s?”

Tom hummed. Harry didn’t say anything further, relaxing against his hold. Tom decided that if Harry wasn’t going to ask any questions further, he would. “I saw you on my television screen.” Harry stilled but Tom continued. “I was shocked and confused. I knew it was you immediately when I saw you on the screen… I have a lot of questions, Harry, but… I knew that if you were going to actually participate in the games - you might like to see a familiar face.”

At that statement, Harry glanced back up to him. With one hand curled and gripped onto his green shirt, the other was held to his jaw. Tom’s heart fluttered at the closeness Harry was to him right now, but he found himself not moving. Until the truck decided to move them anyway, stopping at what Tom can only think to be a red light. They fly back toward the back of the truck - Tom holding out his leg so he could stop the impact. Harry’s head was tight on his chest as they laid on the floor, near the back of the truck.

“Tom—Tom, right?” Harry murmured.

“Yes.” He hissed, observing Harry’s face that bore back at him.

“Why are you here?”

All of Tom’s previous answers disappeared. He blinked, confused, wondering what he meant by that. He just answered that question, didn’t he? “What do you mean?” He asked him, and Harry - flushed with unshed tears stared back at him. Harry mumbled, “you shouldn’t be here - you—you need to go.” Tom bit his inner-cheek. “I know I’m not suppose to be here, but I thought—“

“You thought wrong, Tom.” Harry said. “I’m going to die.”

“No—what?” He paused. “No, Harry. You’re not going to die. I won’t let you.”

Moving his hand so it was on Harry’s lower back, he used his other hand that rested on Harry’s hip to bring him closer. He sat up slightly, using his elbow, moving closer into his personal space. Harry began to sniffle and Tom rubbed his back comfortingly with his right arm. “Harry, I promise you; I’m going to do everything in my power to make you live.”

“Why?” The whiplash of emotions in Harry’s voice devastated him.

Yes, why Tom?

Why was he going at such lengths for this boy?

Curiosity—feelings—power? What?

No; it was because he was in-control of a situation, he would’ve never let it happen.

Tom leaned his forehead forward to meet Harry’s. He was speaking, Tom realised. The soft, tender words of his voice, amazing him. He never once spoke whilst he was at the orphanage. Tom liked to speculate that whatever left him orphaned traumatised him to not be able to speak but he was able to now. He must’ve found closure of sorts to be able to speak to him now. Someone from his past. Harry found himself flushed against his body. Warm. “You did me a favour back then.” Tom decided, “I’m here to repay the favour.”

Harry blinked, confused by his statement. “Favour?”

The truck made its way to the training centre he could tell by the distance and stopped once it was where the tributes got out. Tom watched as the door opened and the peacekeepers retrieved Harry. Tom panicked with worry but knew they wouldn't hurt him. Not with his interest in the boy. But before he was picked and torn from his arms, Harry - panicky - asked, "Tom—what favour?"

He didn't get time to answer. He almost didn't want time to answer since it was almost too embarrassing, the answer.

He made his childhood; the orphanage not a weakness, but a strength. He saved him from murdering all those kids - from burning down the orphanage - from ending him up in jail. He - his presence - gave him the life of a President's successor. He saved him; his intelligence and all, from self-destructing. That was the favour he was repaying.

Tom never felt like being out of control.

Sitting up, the peacekeepers there gave him a look he couldn't understand from underneath their mask. "Are you alright, Mr. Riddle?" He nodded his head at the peacekeepers, getting up from the floor and following Harry inside. Morgan watched but didn't announce her presence to Harry as the peacekeepers took him over to his station. The woman watched Tom with raised eyebrows. She asked, "what happened?"

Tom shrugged his shoulders. "Everything was going well until we got here."

"Whatever," Morgan shook her head. "Just calm him, okay?"

The peacekeeper beside him said. "He's been feisty ever since the reaping ceremony."

Tom nodded his head, that sounded very on point for Harry Potter.

Following the peacekeepers, Harry's eyes trailing him as he followed behind, he turned and found his station, and Tom kept walking towards him. Morgan nudged Tom. "Francisca said that you wanted to help be a designer. I know you can't seem to be biased but you being there for the boy will do a lot to tame him."

"Tame him?" Tom questioned, smug. "I'll see what I can do; Harry's not something tameable."

"Do your best, Mr. Riddle."

He entered the room Harry was taken to and the boy was beginning to be stripped out of his clothes. Harry flushed at Tom, the teenager taking the free seat that was beside him. “What favour, Tom?” Harry asked, but Tom didn’t answer. He kept a curious expression as the designers came out of the different doors to help redesign him.

Tom felt like it was much more proper to explain to him what was about to happen instead of the past. “Harry,” he took his hand. Harry watched with burning curiosity. “What’s about to happen is unpleasant. Uh, I’m not sure you want me to be in the room with you for this but it happens - unfortunately,” he added for compassion reasons, “to every tribute.”

“They’re going to unclothe me?” Harry said accusingly, glaring at the stylist that tried peeling his clothes from him the minute he landed on the bed.

“Ah, yes.” Tom knitted his eyebrows together. “Are you alright with me staying or…?”

Harry looked up at him, observing him. Tom didn’t think those burning emerald eyes would be so fierce so quickly. From the gloom and lack of spark from the reaping ceremony, he thought he had lost all of his fire, but no. Tom was wrong. Harry hadn’t changed. He was still an immovable force. Tom listened and burned at what he had to say. “Tom, we literally had to bathe and shower together back at the orphanage; I think being nude is the last thing I have to worry about people seeing me as.”

So he stayed.

Morgan turned to Tom. “Is he ready to be undressed now?” She seemed to be impatient and Tom turned to Harry who seemed to be observing the conversation with burning curiosity. Wanting to know, wanting to understand. Harry turned his head back to Tom, nodding before Tom said: “yes, he’s ready to be undressed.” Tom watched as Harry was undressed, the teenager taken to a bath of sorts which Morgan put him in.

Moving so he sat on the other side of the bath, Harry watched and leaned on the ledge, looking up at him as Tom made himself comfortable. Morgan began to scrub his skin and Harry yelped as Tom grabbed his flying hand. “You alright?”

“Just,” he breathed in—rattled. “Shocked…”

“Don’t worry, I understand. My stylist, Jules and Francisca brutally scrubbed me this morning.” Harry turned his attention back up to him. The bubbles of the bath hid everything Tom didn’t really want to see as he glanced back down at Harry. The younger of them, rose an eyebrow. “You still have stylists, Tom?”

“Yes,” Morgan admits to Tom. “Their the sole reason Mr. Riddle’s here right now.”

Tom shrugged his shoulders, ignoring the look Harry gave him. “I was really drunk and hungover.”

“Really, you; Tom Riddle?”

A scowl formed on his face. “Well it exactly wasn’t easy seeing you on the television, Harry.”

A sly smirk formed on Harry’s face, eyes fond with cheeks emotional. The cervices around Harry’s eyelids creaked tears that slipped down his face. The hands gripped the ledge of the bathtub as he cried. Tom, unsure of what to say, moved his hand so it was on Harry’s shoulder. “Are you alright?”

Harry didn’t say anything and Morgan gave him a look as if to ask ‘what the fuck are you doing’ but she didn’t say anything either. She kept scrubbing his back and Tom reached for the shampoo to give something for him to do. Pouring some on Harry’s ratty and knotted hair, he began to lather the substance in. Harry leaned against the bathtub, exhausted, Tom could see from his eyes and he told him: “just relax, Harry. I’ll make sure these guys take care of you.”

Falling asleep at the words, Morgan grumbled. “You should’ve done that earlier.”

“Oh, shut up.” Tom tells her.

“He’s not yours to command.”

“But he’s yours?”

Tom scowled at her, continuing to lather the shampoo in his hair.

After he felt he was done, he washed it out, and the stylist who introduced himself as Rhodes began to help Morgan clear up Harry. Tom helped next with the conditioner and lathered it again, in Harry’s hair whilst the two cleaned his body. The bathtub was full of grime

and dirt by the time they were done with cleaning him. Tom tapped Harry awake and the boy woke up, frightened. Tom held Harry and helped him onto the uncomfortable bed as he figured out his surroundings. Harry sighed with relief before sitting back down on the bed and Morgan handed him what almost looked like a hospital gown. Harry watched it and held it nervously before Tom helped him put it on. “Why am I wearing this?”

Rhodes spoke up. “The ceremony is not until 7 o’clock. All tributes would have arrived by four but we actually have to be ready by six thirty and there to be at the chariots. Harry, you arrived at two which means we have a few extra hours. You’ll be in this until five thirty.”

Tom watched him flush at the suggestion, he turned to Morgan who was looking at him.

“Tom, Francisca told me you have to leave here by five to be with her at your mansion by five thirty. Meaning you have to be gone by six thirty to be at the opening ceremony. Do what you like here but a lot of it will be preparing Harry.” Morgan recited to him and Tom nodded in earnest. He turned his attention back at Harry who was staring at him perplexed. “What favour?”

He blinked, sighing. “Not this again.”

“What favour do you owe?”

“I’m not telling you Harry.”

“But I never said you owe me any favours!”

Tom bit his inner-cheek, something that was becoming so irritated it started bleeding, and Tom narrowed his eyebrows at him. “Harry,” he took both of his hands. “Do not worry about it. Is it so hard to believe I just want you alive? For no other reason than that you're my friend.”

Morgan rose her eyes challenging that and Tom threw her a heavy glare.

Harry looked distraught. “Harry,” Tom began, Harry’s hands relaxing in Tom’s. “I’m going to make you live. That’s the favour I’m returning. It doesn’t matter when, or where. I want you to live. So you’ll live. I promise you,” he kisses both his hands, “you’ll live.”

Almost like putty, Harry lets Rhodes and Morgan touch him as they begin to lather him in oils and creams. Harry’s eyes don’t leave Tom

though. Tom takes one of Harry's hands and holds it as the two stylists do their job. Morgan moves closer to Tom. "I'm going to wax Harry, mentally prepare him?" She demands as she turns her back to the boy, Harry's eyes widening.

Tom sighs. "I'll be okay, Harry."

"But—"

"Mr. Potter," Rhodes began. "The more sponsors come from attractiveness. And our beauty standard is being shaved for both men and women."

"But—not down there—"

"No, you don't have to."

Tom and Harry both flushed, looking at each other in lingering fear. Morgan returns with the hot wax. She applies it to his legs and begins the process. Harry hisses and Tom holds his hand tighter, Harry shouting when she rips the hairs from his body. "Fuck!" Harry yelps, Tom - unfortunately - finding the situation funny. Harry slaps him and glares at them all. However, he doesn't remove his hold from his hand. Again, and again, Morgan waxes his skin until all of the hairs are gone. Harry frowns, especially when they wax his facial hairs. "That hurts!"

"Pain is beauty, beauty." Rhodes explains. Harry's nail rips Tom's skin, but he doesn't say anything about it.

After that fiasco is done, Harry grumbles in Tom's arms as they paint his nails a dark green. "It matches his eyes." Tom tells Morgan and she raises her eyebrows at him but decides to comply. Harry accepts the rest of the treatments, except for the eyebrow plucking, again: complaining, but unable to do much about it. Then, as four thirty started to roll around - Tom found his hold on Harry stronger.

"Tom," Harry mumbled. "You have to go soon."

He sighed, not knowing what else to say besides yes. "I am, but Harry. I promise I'll try and find another moment where I get to speak to you again. Just make sure you get another with Sedge and act strong in your own right, okay?"

Harry's dim eyes find him, the emerald hardly shining. Tom takes his hands, but Harry speaks before him. "There are a lot of older

teenagers this year. Four eighteen year-olds and six seventeen year-olds - including myself. What makes you think I have a chance?"

"Because - I know you. You're smart. You'll figure out a way. And I'm not planning on leaving you by yourself. I plan on trying to find you sponsors and fans, people to route for you. Maybe, you won't be in the career pack. I'd actually advise against the career pack. Stay low, pretend as if you have nothing to offer and keep all your skills hidden. Put on a good show tonight, and I'll try to find you before the interviews. Just try to make a potential ally in Sedge first okay?"

Harry nods his head before deciding to do something completely reckless.

He wraps his arms around Tom, and Tom rests his head against his head gently as Harry grips the back of his shirt with tense emotions. Morgan and Rhode say nothing as they watch the display, Tom glaring at them to turn away and they do, before Tom murmurs: "people are going to love you. Harry," he pulls back, holding his jaw. "You will be okay."

He whispers into his ears. "I might not be able to come to you physically always, but I have ways: okay? Trust me."

Harry nods and lets go of Tom.

Tom kisses both his inner-wrists before kissing his forehead. "You'll be okay."

"I know, Tom. I know."

Departing from Harry might've been one of the hardest things Tom has ever done but once he was outside of the room, knowing he wouldn't be able to see him until he made another opportunity, he immediately ran outside to Francisca who was waiting for him there. It was dark and he jumped into her car as she drove them away. "How on earth am I going to be able to see him again?"

"Is he your lover or something, Tom?" Francisca commented.

"No—what?" He flushed. "No! What makes you think that?"

Francisca shrugs her shoulders, gesturing to him. "You seem close."

Tom turns to Francisca. "France, I was born in an orphanage. I grew up with Harry." Her eyes flew open with shock but he continued,

rushed. “I don’t know what happened but somehow he’s now reaped for the Hunger Games—what do I do?—I can’t—I can’t see him die, France. Never.” Francisca pulled to the side of the road, turning to him completely.

“*Oh*, Tom.” She pulled him into a hug, and Tom gently rested his head on her chest, looking away from her artificial breasts. “I’m sorry, I didn’t know.”

Pulling away at the first chance that he has, he tells her, “it’s okay—I just—“

“No, it’s understandable. You don’t want to see him perish. I understand.”

She pauses, turning back to the wheel. Deciding to drive, she moves slowly, hurrying to the mansion at the slowest pace that she was allowed to go. Francisca takes deep breaths. “Tonight is the opening ceremony. Tomorrow, the tributes have their training at 9 o’clock in the morning until 12 o’clock when they have lunch together, and finish until 3 o’clock. But they’re allowed to stay until 9 o’clock at night.” She hums. “What are your thoughts about… sleeping with him?”

“Pardon?” Tom was taken aback.

“It sounds perplexing but trying to move you into the training centre is going to be difficult after 3 o’clock. And it would be easier for you to leave at 9 o’clock if you wanted to do something. You're the President’s successor, yes?” Tom agrees with the statement. “Does he know Harry?”

He pauses. “I don’t know. I’ve never directly spoken about Harry before.”

“Good, then you’ll be able to hang out with him after his training sessions in his room.”

Tom thinks for a moment. “What if the President tries to talk with me?”

“Then, in that case, you’ll make up an excuse about where you are and we’ll try to get you back as quickly as possible. Dumbledore doesn’t know where you are right this instance does he?” Tom shakes his head then. “Then, go tell Dumbledore that you and your friends are meeting up after school and that you have to be there: a project of

sorts. Lie if you must."

"What about school?"

"Tom, I'm sure you can get away with being 'sick' for a week to be with him. Just don't let Dumbledore know that you're not going to school, and certainly not that Snape boy. He would definitely rat to Dumbledore about your whereabouts." Tom nods his head to that plan, he can do it. For some reason, Francisca has come up with a brilliant plan. Maybe a fresh outsider's perspective is what he needs.

They reach the mansion. Jumping out, Francisca tells him that she'll be in his room in fifteen minutes and to act ready. Tom agrees and hurries back to his bedroom where nobody is waiting for him. Tom thinks Dumbledore knows he escaped for some freedom but to allow him to so he would be able to reunite later. He waits until his designers and stylists arrive, preparing for his appearance. Francisca did his hair as Jules did his clothes. Penny helped with his other extensions and features, doing his makeup.

None of them spoke before he walked through the mansion to meet up with a dressed up Dumbledore and Snape. Snape seemed to be ready to lurk in the shadows, however. Phone in his pocket blowing up, he follows Dumbledore to the car, turning back to see Francisca winking at him as he enters the limousine. Snape followed behind Tom.

"Albus," Tom begins. "I was with my friends and I spoke to them about a project we're working on at school. Seeing as I'm no longer allowed to do Borgin and Burkes, I was just letting you know that's what is happening after school with them so I won't be able to return home on time."

"Is that true now?" Dumbledore eyed him. "Then, I suppose you're allowed to stay with them after school - not like that hasn't stopped you before."

Tom bit his inner-cheek, annoyed. This old fuck.

He grabbed his phone and began to message the group chat. 'Where are you guys sitting?'

'Oh why Tom? Getting ready to escape the devil's grasp.' Bella texted first like usual.

'We're in Section A2.'

‘I’ll be with the President for the first half of the night but I’ll escape to hang out with you guys for the rest of the night.’

‘Good.’ Nott replied.

‘How fun!!’ Bella sent a few images of where they were sitting and their gowns.

‘Andromeda’s with you guys?’

‘Ma and Pa forced her to come.’

‘It’s good news.’ Narcissa tells him.

‘Good.’

Tom thinks for a moment before texting. ‘Borgin and Burkes can’t come anymore.’

The chat was quiet for a mere moment before everyone began to send him messages. ‘What?’ Bella texted him. ‘They can’t do that!’ Evans was keeping quiet but sent a question mark in confusion. Nott sent: ‘an epidemic right?—still they can’t cancel it all together.’ Narcissa replied to all the comments. ‘It’s not going to stop him though, aren’t I right?’

Everyone was waiting for his answer.

Narcissa was right.

‘I’m still planning on conversing with the victors and tributes. Which means, I need you to cover for me at school. I’ll tell you guys the plan later. Just understand this is a favour you’re completing for me.’ The texts in favour of helping him were immediate. He was glad he had loyal followers like his friends.

Dumbledore watched him perplexed but they arrived before he could say anything.

“Are we ready?”

Both Snape and Tom nodded. They were forced to withstand heaps of cameras whiplashing them as they made their way into the spotlight.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Title: End Game by Taylor Swift

Memorable Lyrics
"Big Reputation, big reputation
... you and me, we got big reputations
... and you heard about me
... and I got some big enemies
... you and me would be a big conversation"
Alternative Chapter Title: Devil's Advocate by The Neighbourhood
Word Count: 7.6k

I'm surprised we're almost at 150 hits already and I posted the first chapter like 3 days ago, <3 for the kudos + subscriptions
Lmk what you think about this chapter, I'd be glad to hear it
Up next, Enchanted
P S

Enchanted

Chapter Summary

The Tribute's Parade.

Chapter Notes

Posted: 31st of January, 2024

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tom took his place beside Dumbledore, on a podium high-up in the sky, overlooking everything. The chariots were slowly beginning to come out, starting at District 1 and ending at District 12. Meaning, Tom would get all of the entrees before he got to what he really wanted to see. Snape was nowhere to be seen and Dumbledore did his usual business as the President, watching with hawk eyes and like a maniac whilst Tom - perfect Tom kept everything together.

District 1 seemed to be dressed up like fairy tale characters: Alistar Fenlon and Persephone Ryde in golden suit and dress, their faces covered in golden glitter around the sides of their cheeks and foreheads, before disconnecting near the middle of their foreheads. They both had golden, white wings that flickered with colour. Beautiful, and one of the better outfits Tom has seen.

Perhaps to the Black girls' mother, Druella Black, fashion in the Capitol has changed immensely. Things that once were gloomy and stable became vessels of perfection when lights were involved with the tributes' clothing.

Bella texted him, Tom glancing down at his phone for a mere moment. '9/10.'

'Acceptable,' he texted back.

Then, the next chariot came out: District 2. Since Masonry was their District's contribution, Valor Whitlock and Susan Bones wore black armour that wrapped around them. Showcasing them off as warriors, usually District 2 didn't add lights which was a success for this get-up, Tom thinks this time. Bella texted again. '7/10. Less impressive.'

'Judgemental.' Evans texted. 'Not even 7.5/10.'

‘I could create the outfit in my sleep. They should try harder.’

Tom looked up from his phone when the next chariot came out. District 3, who had a beloved amongst their ranks this year. Silver had similar make up done to him as District 1, with silver covering his face but it went down to his neck and he wore an electric blue shirt that had lights woven into the material. Impressive. The man in the outfit additionally looked quite dazzling. Lux, the girl, is less so but he can tell what the designers did to try and make her stand out by showcasing her breasts more. Tom wrinkled his nose at the sight but accepted she was just trying to do what she could to live. Even as revolting as it was. She probably didn’t like it either, but he can admit Lux looked more Capitol like than any of them - especially so now cleaned, than all of the previous tributes. Even more so than Silver.

Bella was a fashion icon like her mother. So it was no surprise when she gave her opinion, yet again about the outfits. ‘8.3/10. Silver looks like something sweet I could eat and Lux definitely looks delicious. Is it just me or does she look like Azula Brown in the grade underneath us? Regardless, they look great. I should follow the designer.’

‘Sissy, she does but do you mind not being so careless. Tom needs to watch them.’

‘Yes - but I can read.’ Tom replies. ‘Just I can’t text too much.’

‘Alright then!’

District 4 came out as she texted that and Tom squinted to see their outfits better as they rode forward on their chariot. Tom flushed in surprise. Skin. That’s all what the two were. Laurent wore something similar to Cedric Diggory did back when he was first reaped and his abs were shown clearly and so were Pearl’s. District 4, always pumping out powerhouses. Tanned and sun burnt skins, certainly a look the Capitol liked seeing. Tom became disgusted again, being reminded of Barty and his performance at the Vos. What a fucking ride that was.

Bella replied. ‘7/10. As much as I love skin, it’s unoriginal. I need something original!’

‘Her abs…’ Lucius texted.

‘Careful now.’ Narcissa was always someone Tom could laugh with.

His eyes were back on the rest of the tributes that began to flicker

through. The girl from District 5, Romilda Vane, had her breasts displayed for the world as well as she came through. Dressed in a lightning inspired get-up, Tom noted that Bella was much displeased with the lack of originality in District 5 the most so far. Then, District 6 came out and the comments of cuteness from the groupchat came rolling in. ‘Oh she’s so cute with the transportation inspired outfit.’

‘And so is he!’

The poor twelve and fourteen year-old.

Up next was District 7 which had the seventeen year-old. Bella’s text was immediate. ‘Lestrange is having a blood nose.’ Tom squinted to see the outfit from a distance, and then he stopped. Shit. It was blood nose worthy material, he thinks. She certainly did have breasts to enhance but instead of doing so, they covered them up in a fern dress. It was exquisite and Tom thinks it was the right decision. Realistically, skin can be used as a weapon but at the same time, the lack of skin shown can be just as powerful. People want more when they don’t get it the first time. Tom could see the vision and manipulation. Her silhouette was beautiful.

The boy, twelve, was dressed up kindly. Nothing inappropriate but Tom found it fitting. He included his own opinion of 7. ‘7 is 8.6/10. I liked the manipulation of what the designer was trying to do with the G. And the B was done elegantly. Thoughts, Bella?’

‘District 7’s G killed my fiancé.’

‘Appropriate.’

Not realising Bella and Lestrange had been courted, comments began to spam the group chat as Tom watched District 8 come through on their chariot. Their outfits were like a peacekeepers', but were designed in a way that was instead black and uniform to create dominance. He texts the chat. ‘8 deserves a good 6/10.’ Bella accepted that as fact.

The next District was 9 and their main industry was grain production so their golden yellow clothes were nothing out of the ordinary. Tom wouldn’t even say there was nothing abnormal about it because of how often the trope is used in the same way. Bella called it a ‘5/10’ and Tom couldn’t correct her.

10 was next and their chariot was magnificent. The horses were pure white and their outfits were better than the past ten years which was

saying something. He gleamed with interest, observing the choices of the designs - deciding it was definitely nothing to scoff at: the shirts a perfect cream colour and headpieces soft leather headbands instead of a cow-head like usual. Tom deemed it a '7/10' and Bella in-put her own opinion, 'it's more like a 6.5/10 but I still find it impressive considering what a load of junk last year's was.'

He could feel the stares on him as 11 came out.

Agriculture was their district's industry and Tom observed their outfits. The eighteen year-old from 11 wore a soft fabric and the thirteen year-old seemed challenging in her outfit. Not like she was weak and defenceless but like a weapon. However, nothing was in-comparison to what District 12's tributes were put in. Tom's cheeks flushed when he saw Harry. Harry was wearing nothing revealing by any means but like District 7's girl had his silhouette executed perfectly. The clothes he wore were black and tight, Sedge in an identical outfit - adjusted for her size as she was slightly bigger and taller than Harry. Then, he watched it happen. District 12's tributes were on fire. Their clothes were made out of a material fire-proof but magnificent. Dazzling, Tom narrowed his eyebrows, sharpening his eyes onto his boy.

Fire; coal. It made perfect sense and he first saw the outfit utilised last year when the tributes from 12 were set on fire. Tom was going to compliment Morgan on the outfit later and display his favour towards the outfit, to Harry, once he got the chance to see him again.

Bella texted the group chat. 'I think 12, despite their stupidly weak players, has the best outfit again this year. Last year really set the record, didn't it?'

'12… Tom, are you alright? You seemed flushed.' Narcissa sent and Tom immediately tried to compose himself. Relaxing his eyebrows and shoulders as he turned his gaze away from Harry. He sent back an immediate response. 'The fires that are in front of me are burning my cheeks.' And it wasn't false, but certainly wasn't the entire truth.

Riding forward, Tom couldn't take his eyes off of the boy. His boy.

This was the boy that once knew everything about Tom and Tom knew everything about Harry in return. The boy that used to sleep in his bed because Tom couldn't fall asleep at night - lacking warm clothes, and he happened to be so warm. This was the boy that happened to kiss his cuts better and this was the boy Tom gave his

book recommendations to. Harry once spoke at the orphanage but they knew each other on a deeper level, no one else in Tom's life has ever met. Harry looked up from the chariot and stared at Tom, his sun kissed cheeks were something to die for - emerald eyes something worth more than gems - body, soul, mind: priceless. Tom wasn't going to let him die, he reminded himself. He wouldn't be able to cope with himself if he did.

This was something that was his. Harry was his. Not Dumbledore's. Not something every Capitol kid had. Something Capitol kids despise: the two of them together. The boy who never spoke and the boy who never liked anyone else. That was them, and it still was them.

Tom could see it by Harry's eyes and Tom was sure Harry knew it by his.

Their trust went deeper than the great depths.

Then, Harry's chariot parked and he realised once again - lost in his mind - that he was on television with Dumbledore making his yearly speech. He kept quiet, not wanting to cause a scene, but both Tom and Harry knew their eyes were on one another the entire time. Even if Tom had to do the occasional glance at the other tributes. Harry looked like something out of a fantasy, he was beautiful. Curly hair made into something artful, tanned skin something Tom would want to eat - it all made him flush with interest. He wondered what Harry thought of him.

The minute Dumbledore stepped down from the pedestal and the cameras were off of them, Tom gracefully stood up and left to go meet his friends. Diverge a plan to meet his boy. People were distracting, they always were, but trying to meet Mr. Riddle - the new known successor to the President of Panem was sometimes a burden. This time, it was.

His name spoke from everyone's mouths and he had to be helped by Bella, and a grumpy Narcissa to their table, overlooking the tributes on the seventeenth floor of the stadium. Narcissa sat beside him and Lucius today, Bella on his other side. She pursed her lips, crossing them together. "They're so pushy, Tom. You should really say something about their lack of personal space."

"It's alright, Narcissa. It's something I'm going to have to get used to." Tom tells her but that only makes her respond with a roll of the eyes. Across from him was the second oldest Black, Andromeda Black. She

wore a colourful arrangement and her makeup was nothing less than perfection. Much like her sisters, her style was personal and coordinated to every event she went to. Tom didn't like Andromeda because of her rebellious streak but he could give her credit for her clothing choices. She was the prettiest and best dressed Black girl after all.

She gave Tom a heavy expression, calculating. "Still becoming president, Tom Riddle?"

"I was born to become the president, Andromeda Black."

Perhaps not born but chosen, nonetheless, from an orphanage to become the president: something he doesn't want to tell the entire population though - and Andromeda Black was everything from a weapon to a gossip. Her gaining her hands on that piece of information would be lethal. They shared harsh glances but said nothing else to displease the other as they were already walking on a thin line. Bella said nothing but Narcissa changed the subject almost immediately once they were done conversing. "Who is our personal vote for this year?"

"Ah," Nott nodded his head. "Yes, it would be the perfect time to announce our bets."

The betting system of the Knights of Walpurgis was as explained: every year, their group of Tom, Lucius, Narcissa, Bella, Lestrange, Evans, Nott, Alecto, Amycus, Barty, and occasionally - Yaxley, Crabbe, Goyle, Gibbon, and Greengrass did bets on who they thought was going to win that year. Tom knew who he was placing his bets on - not one to waste money on who he knew was going to be the assured winner: Harry Potter, who was everything to Tom. And out of 24 tributes, usually a few of them picked the same tribute to root for especially if everyone else was weak. Tom always said his decision last, not wanting to have everyone else vote with him.

Narcissa started first. "I placed over two million dollars on Silver."

"Adamant, sissy?" Bella stuck her tongue out cheekily at her. "Two million for my 7 girl."

Tom hummed, Lestrange touching Bella's curls gently in awe. He found the act disgusting but Bella said nothing about it. Enjoying the touch, enjoying the way Tom's eyes moved at the actions. What a sick game they were both playing with, Tom sneered but he said nothing. His eyes weren't on either, anyway. Lestrange glanced up. "I'm going

with District 2's girl."

Alecto nodded her head. "I'll go with District 2's boy, Valor."

"My sister might've picked 2, but I think District 1's girl has a chance."

Nott wrote down and added all their sayings into the system online. Where their odds are predictable based on a series of codes both Nott and Tom wrote up and perfected. The old version of the betting system is actually what the majority of the Capitol uses to bet on their favourites. The Knights of Walpurgis use the modern system. Nott glances up, "I'm going with District 2's girl as well." Lestrange stuck his tongue out at him but Nott didn't bat an eye.

Evans was a mess. Brown and reddish hair crumpled into a pitiful display, suit and tie undone, posture a disastrous sight, and a glass of whiskey in his hand: drunk and hungover at the same time, he raised his glass and said. "I'll go with District 10's boy. He might go out with a bang."

"The one with no eye?" Narcissa questioned more so for his choice than her question.

"Mhm," he agreed.

Barty clicks his fingers together. "I'm feeling like an outlier this year. 10's girl is my pick."

Glancing at Lucius, who was the last one to speak up besides Tom, the teenager was in deep thought. "I know it seems a bit… unusual, but I think District 12's girl might produce some interesting results." Tom bobbed his head at him, intrigued whilst Bella gasped in surprise. Nott's eyebrows were blown back and Barty laughed at the choice. "She's my pick this year."

It took a minute before Bella turned to him to ask what his choice was. He was careful and smooth with his words, not wanting to reveal too much in front of Andromeda. She was eyeing him with interest as he spoke. "Like Lucius, I think 12 holds much potential this year." Fortunately for Tom, Lucius gave him the momentum he needed to speak about Harry without any backlash. And if any information he could shut down within a blink of an eye. Bella was full of delight as he continued, "12's boy holds my interest. He'll be my pick this year. Andromeda?"

Passing the conversation to her, she would have to respond with something enlightening her facial expressions of surprise and confusion. She held her tongue for the most part. “12?”

“Yes,” he hummed without disregard. “I know victors when I see the tributes.”

“A lot of confidence there,” she nods her head at him.

“I know he’ll win.”

Tom kept silent which controlled the group’s decision to move on from the topic. Andromeda glanced up at Tom, nodding at him. “Despite my hatred of the Games,” her voice was lingering. “I do think the boy from 12 will win also but I’m not placing my bets on it.” Tom’s eyes widened, before glaring at her. Andromeda was a woman of character, she had her ambitions and a strong moral compass. She saw what the Capitol did, what the Knights of Walpurgis did, and could understand them thoroughly but wouldn’t accept joining. Tom understands. They both do. The way they stare at each other, trying to investigate what the other is thinking only proves it. Unlike her sisters, Bella and Narcissa, she knew the Capitol’s manipulations a lot more clearly in their everyday lives. Tom didn’t berate her for that, he would never to a clever person but speaking of District 12’s boy: his boy, his Harry — Tom wouldn’t stand it. Especially not for what Andromeda stood for. A rebellion to arise. Something that would shock the world to its core. Unstability.

That’s what she was saying she saw in Harry. Tom’s betted tribute, and his childhood boy.

“We’ll see, Andromeda.” Nott snaps at her quickly. “My tribute has better odds.”

“Yes,” Evans says, agreeing, but adds, turning in Tom’s direction, “but he also voted on him.”

Bella quirks her head. “Oh, a little friendly competition now?”

“You really should place a bet, Sissy.” Narcissa says as if she doesn’t understand the weight of that statement, in accordance with her sister. Tom and Andromeda don’t break eye contact. They stay like that for a minute, watching what the other was perceiving the other as. Their thoughts, their queries. Neither said anything before snapping their attention away from one another.

Andromeda answered swiftly, “no. I will not bet on your negligence game.”

Tom stands up and declares, “I’m going to grab a drink. Would anyone like to accompany me?”

Narcissa stands, turning to Lucius, giving him a note. “I’ll come.”

They leave before anyone else has time to say their answer.

Heading towards the bar, he finds a private and distanced spot to sit alongside Narcissa. She plays with her hair as she stares at the bartender, whisking her eyelashes at him flirtatiously. Tom rolls his eyes at the display but her eyes snap to him in a single movement. “Tom,” she begins. “The project you want us to conduct to lie to the President about, what do you want it to include?” She says it in a way that she understands he’s planning on doing something out of character for himself. After all, he’s never done a project excuse before.

He clears his throat, ordering his order, Narcissa ordering hers and Lucius’ before coming back to his train of thought. “Getting closer with the tributes is something the President isn’t fond of me doing. Likewise with the victors. I need an excuse to stay out of the house and prove I’m over at your houses for sleepovers.”

Narcissa winks at him cheekily. “Getting frisky with the victors now are we?”

Tom clutches his hand underneath the table. “No, not exactly. Just information gathering.”

“Ah, Tom. Of course, we can. Do not worry about us not performing up to standard.”

The mutualism ended the conversation without the need of any more unnecessary words. Tom picked up his drink and headed back, with Narcissa and her two drinks, behind him. They sat down and Tom began to drink heavily. The night was young and to ignore Dumbledore - it was the best option for him. Bella began to buy shots and the whole table was doing rounds before any more heavy topics were spoken about. Tom blinked exhaustedly, face flushed as he continued to drink down more of the harsh and violent liquids. He sniffled at once and decided, when he felt the angry itch behind his eyes, making them water, he should head off. Taking Barty’s whisky flask with him which he told him he could have, he departed from the

group and found himself on the outside steps of the stadium. It was where the tributes' horses were hidden but no tributes were found there. Tom had a bad habit of falling asleep where he didn't belong so when he woke up next, it was with Francisca dragging him up.

"Come on, sweetheart."

She took one arm over her shoulder as she directed him to the car. He was a babbling mess by the time she clipped him in. The purple styled hair was magnificent like it always was, parted into a single braid along the back as she stared at him with a complex look on her face. She was hesitant and puzzled, Tom could tell, even in his drunken haze. "Tom," she placed both of her hands - which were gloved, onto his face. Cheeks sizzling at the touch. "I'm not taking you back to the Mansion."

His voice was overwhelmed by the sheer need to breathe. "W-where, Francie?"

Eyes dropping to her dress, the purple shades overwhelmed his vision completely as she answered him. "I'm taking you back to my apartment. The Mansion isn't a safe place for you to be at the moment, with the state you're in, and knowing you'd want to be out of the President's hair. I'll let you have my guest room."

It took him a while to understand the meaning of her words but she didn't move until she had an answer from him. He hummed in agreement, Francisca moving to the other side of the car, getting in and driving off. Tom was in and out of consciousness, but by the time they got to her house, Francisca helping him into the apartment and helping him unclothe - bathing him - and reclothing him, she put him to bed almost like what Tom could imagine a mother would. With drugs in his system to help erase the alcohol effects, Tom went to bed covered in layers in a haze.

When he woke up the next morning, without a pounding headache but starving, he found himself wandering the apartment in awe. It was almost all purple. An ultraviolet colour that depraved the rooms of interest: they certainly were individual but Tom found it to be overbearing. The only colour besides ultraviolet was the white bedsheets that he slept on. And the couch, apparently, as Francisca sat on it - observing the news.

"Alright, sweetheart?" The woman shocked him by wearing pure white, not the usual purple she was known for. It made her seem more

human as he sat beside her, noticing she was also smoking a cigarette.

He hummed, deciding to take one of the cigarettes from the packet on the couch and steal the lighter to use it to light his whilst he was at it. Francisca gave him a perplexed glance but turned her gaze away from him to look back at the television that stood covering most of the wall in front of them. “What’s on the news that is so interesting?” He questioned, watching her gaze before following along to what the news report was actually about.

“Your President decided it was a good idea to implement less district travel starting from today.”

“Huh?” Tom thought that was odd since he didn’t hear about it beforehand but he was drunk, so.

He shrugged his shoulders. “He occasionally does that when more assaults happen in the districts.” Forbid Tom says the word, rebellions that are occurring but he again, didn’t hear much information about that side of things either. Francisca turned to him, wearing silk, making her face glow and hair flow more than usual. Lots of things were coming to light based on the new development of Tom in her home.

She smirked, tilting the cigarette to her lips before blowing the smoke away. “Your lover boy has begun his training, it’s ten o’clock right now so if you would like to sneak into his room — now would be the time to do so.”

“I don’t have any of my things though,” he tells her.

“Don’t worry; I’ll sort all of that out for you, sweetness.”

Dressed in a smart-casual t-shirt, white with a green belt to hold up his black pants, despite it being summer; Tom strolled out of Francisca’s apartment with a small maroon suitcase packed with two t-shirts, two pairs of pants, two pairs of socks, and all of the essentials he would need to stay cooped up in a room for a day. Francisca drove him to the back of the Training Centre building and Tom entered via the private entrance. He walked with an Avox dubbed Pastel due to her colourful hair and was taken to the penthouse building. From the elevator, he was able to watch the tributes train, but was unable to identify who Harry was before he was ushered inside. There, he was met with a drunk Remus Lupin.

This was not going to work, he declared to himself, as he watched the

man sleep with a bottle of heavy liquor in his hand. Popping up right beside him was a Capitol woman, or should Tom say girl — since she couldn't be older than eighteen, who introduced herself surprisedly as Fleur Delacour. She was dressed romantically, and bashed red when she saw him. "Mr. Riddle," she cooed. "It's an honour."

"As well as you, Miss. Delacour." She was from an honourable family but she was still young.

The girl was flushed when she saw the state of Remus in front of Tom but Tom put his hand up at it. "Don't you worry about him," he said hurriedly. "He will participate to help both the tributes have the best chances of winning." The blonde held both her hands together worriedly but agreed with him on his confidence. He passed her his luggage. "I'll be staying in Mr. Potter's room."

She blinked, her mouth moving so it was agape. "Harry's?"

"Yes," he agreed with her. "I happen to know him."

"Oh… Oh!" She didn't say anything more before handing the Avox, Pastel the luggage — determined to do something, Tom could see so forefront in her mind by her body language. He said nothing, knowing he would have her secrecy unless she would like to end up dead, and turned to the other issue on Tom's plate. He moved over to Remus Lupin who was snoring on the couch. Glancing around, he reached for the closest thing that Tom thought might wake him up. His liquor was stolen and splashed all over him as Tom jumped back so as not to get hit.

"Ah!" Remus began to swing before he came to his senses; nobody was there to attack him. Tom leant against the green couch with interest, watching the man observe him with perplexed, drunken thoughts. He sniffled at the smell of 12 before grabbing his arms. "What—what do you think you are doing!" He shouted at him, Tom rolled his eyes. Tom said, "I'm cleaning you up, old man. You better thank me for doing you a favour."

Entering Remus' bedroom which was clear from the state of it, he shoved the emotionally crippled man into the bathtub before turning it on. "What the hell?"

Tom turned the bathtub on, effectively drowning his body and clothes. Remus yelped at the heat, Tom turning to the shampoos and conditioners: turning the water to freezing cold so Tom could sober Remus up immediately. "Who the hell do you think you are?" Remus

glares at him viciously with venom struck in his voice.

“I’m here as Harry’s only hope, seeing as you're not. And don’t think about daring to defy me.”

At the proclamation, Remus fell silent - only watching his arms as they began to shed him of his wet clothes and scrub shampoos (that Tom thought could do any success in trying to shed the absolute atrocity his hair was) into his hair. Remus by the end looked like a lost mole rat.

Reaching for a towel, Tom covered him in it as if he was a baby and began to pat him down. Then, almost as if Remus snapped out of his daze, shouted at him. “What on fuck’s earth are you doing?” He grabbed the towel for himself and Tom stepped a foot back, watching with interest. This was what the District 12’s sole victor was like: rabid, drunken beyond despair, and one of the most pathetic men Tom has ever laid his eyes on before.

He spoke like Remus was a lone, frightened wolf. “I need Harry to win this.”

Remus’ eyes went wide. “Harry… did you say?”

“Are you deaf?” Tom began to walk out of the bathroom and into the District 12 rancid state-smelling room. He pulled two pieces of fresh garments out of the draws Fleur must’ve brought for Remus, and placed them on the bed where the man watched him. Then, he grabbed a pair of fresh under garments and put them alongside his clothes. He pointed at him. “Harry’s not dying on my watch so fresh and sober up or else you’ll regret it for the rest of eternity.”

Turning on his toe, he left the room and headed over to where the Avoxes were setting up lunch for the sole victor and escort. He took a seat and began to eat, starving as he hadn’t eaten at Francisca’s despite her requests for him to eat. Watching Fleur return from Harry’s room, she sat opposite to him and watched him hesitantly: unlike Remus though, adoration was on her face which wasn’t unusual for him. “Mr. Riddle, I’ve set up your clothes in Harry’s bedroom… does he know to expect your presence?”

He swallows his food, which is rich salmon before answering. “He’ll understand.”

“Ah—okay,” she nods, not putting up much of a fight. “Shall Sedge know you're here?”

“Preferably not, thank you, Fleur.”

She takes a sip of wine the Avox, Pastel, cracks open and pours into her glass for her and she hums in delight. “Are we expected to see your presence over the next week then, Mr. Riddle?” Tom hums, still eating his food with a slight speed she wasn’t offended at the poor answer at. Although, truth be told, Tom couldn’t care about what she thought of him. Fleur continued. “I’m supposing you’ll be overlooking Harry’s interview training, I’ve been trying to get him to cooperate but he’s so fickle the child.”

Tom grabs his own glass and takes a sip. “Don’t worry about him, he’ll be fine. Just worry about Sedge.”

“Alright, sir.”

They don’t converse any longer, Fleur beginning her food as Remus Lupin begrudgingly crawling out of his cave. Tom gave Remus a loaded, observation look and he glared at him — the man taking a seat at the end of a table, without a glass of alcohol for once. He began, “what is the meaning of this business with Harry?” He accused, “you’re the President’s successor. You shouldn’t be here, Riddle.”

Tom ignored his question, Fleur glaring at him. “Mr. Riddle should be addressed properly,” she took a bite of her food in annoyance. After she swallowed her piece, she turned back to the man. “And if you didn’t know, he is going to try and tame that beast, he is.”

“Harry is not a beast,” Tom tells her and Remus looks surprised at his answer.

“The boy was eating from his hands on the train, Mr. Riddle.” Fleur said with all sincerity. “Sedge followed along with his nasty example. His hair’s a knotted and uncontrollable mess. He still is covered in dirt from District 12, the boy still smells, and if anything—“ Remus was reaching the level of pissed off Tom was and he wondered why, “the boy is a paradox. He knows how to use cutlery but he won’t! He likes the look of the penthouse but he stays not a second out here, he loves the sun but he won’t leave. And he thanks Avoxes.”

Tom blinked before sighing. Capitol children. That’s what the adults of the Capitol were.

Fleur cannot help herself because she is a product of her environment like Harry and Tom — and everyone else in the world. He reminds himself that as he deals with her. “Well,” Tom states plainly. “Harry is

mine so I'm going to make sure he has the best chance at winning."

"But—" Remus speaks up.

Tom interrupts, unable to help himself. "I need a stable and sober mentor to help him. I'm Capitol and as much as I hate to admit it, District tricks are what makes a winner. I see it all the time so you'll need to stop drinking and actually help me aid him." Remus is perplexed, fingers jittering. He turns back to his food, finishing his plate and stands. "He is going to need all the manner training he can too if he wants to win the public over also, so… Fleur: take no offence but I'm kind of stealing your job."

"Take no offence to it at all, Mr. Riddle! If you can teach that boy manners, please do so."

Standing up, bothered by what it seems to be two of the most annoying people Tom has ever had the "pleasure" to meet, he heads over to Harry's bedroom. Inside, Tom found his eyes widening. The layout was quite large, much larger than he expected and was able to hold a bed larger than a king in the middle of the room. The windows were dimmed from the outside so nobody could see inside and Tom shivered underneath the heavy air conditioner.

Besides the space of the room and the luxury of it, he could see the little additions of Harry that made the place more like a lived-in space than anything. The scarf he wore to the reaping was on his bedside table, alongside a glass of water. His District 12 shoes were sprawled out on the floor, ratty little things they were - so Harry could be provided with more comfort when training. Two rings were beside the bed and Tom blinked. They were so familiar.

A necklace Harry used to wear had two rings attached to it. Tom would stare at it as they were bathing and wondered who they belonged to, understanding almost inherently they were Harry's parents'. He must still be wearing the necklace but kept the rings here for safe keeping. Good thinking on his part. Tom went into the bathroom and noticed it was hardly touched. Tom took out his phone and glanced at the texts he was getting in the group chat.

'Hey Tom,' it was a Monday and Bella was sending Tom a text during school hours. What a rebel.

'Yes, Bella?'

'He's busy, Sissy. He's on a mission.'

‘I know that, just wanted an update.’

‘It’s successful so far.’

Sitting at the end of the bed, Tom watched the phone tickle away with messages from his companions. It was still early and Harry wouldn’t be back for another few hours so Tom made himself comfortable on the bed, ordering expensive clothes with his secret account (Dumbledore and Snape had no idea about) and having them delivered to Harry’s room so he would have clothes gifted to wear. Tom could tell he was struggling to wear the ones Capitol provided due to the association he would have with the Capitol. It was two o’clock when the clothes showed and the men put them into the closet alongside Tom’s things. Clothes that were nice and luxury, but comfortable and less extravagant than the usual Capitol clothing. Just like the old days.

At one point, Tom fell asleep due to the lack of sleep the night before and awoke with a buzz of his phone. Turning on his side to answer it, he heard movement from outside (so distantly he thought it was nothing before realising they must be back as it was 3 o’clock.) Sitting up at the end of the bed, he waited with a baited breath to see him again.

The door slid open and shut quickly behind Harry as he stood there in the room, sweaty and bothered. Glancing up, Harry’s eyes locked onto his and he only stood agape at him whilst Tom nervously shuffled on the bed so he was sitting more on the edge than how he was previously, spread out. “Tom…” Harry’s voice cracked and he almost ran to him, grabbing his shoulders and burying him underneath him.

“Uh, you’re sweaty Harry,” Tom groaned but Harry only laughed, relaxing on top of him before leaning forward and flailing on his side, turning to him.

“You’re back. I mean, I thought you were going to struggle to get here but turns out, no. Not at all.” Harry grabbed his hand and held them to his cheek, leaning on them. Tom flushed, staring at Harry’s eyes obsessively like the exclusive gems they were. He gulped down his worries and began to brush, with his other hand, a curl behind Harry’s ear. “How did it go,” he asked him.

Harry bit his lip, sitting up before moving closer to him, laying on top of him. Tom found their legs tangled but made no effort to move them, the closeness felt like how they used to be at the orphanage,

Tom holding Harry's nape gently, helping him stay afloat and watching him with keen eyes. Harry answered his question diligently, "the girl from 2 is probably the nicest of the career pack but she's quite… uh… career pack-y," he told him. Tom, with his other hand, stroked Harry's cheek softly with the pad of his thumb, beckoning him to keep going.

"The District 1's are real annoyances. 11's okay, and so is 10. 4's girl is a bit vicious and 3's boy is a bit delicate." He told him with a lot of detail; okay, maybe Harry wasn't the most observational of them all but he certainly was useful with his knowledge. Tom watched as Harry wrapped both his arms around his neck, pulling him in closer. Then, he laid his head on his chest."I—Tom?"

"Yes, Harry?"

"You're a real asshole, you know that."

Tom blinked before relaxing again. "I'm sorry," he whispered hesitantly, knowing internally he would never say that for anyone but him. "I know a letter wasn't going to suffice but Dumbledore wasn't allowing me for a lot of time to retrieve my things. He didn't give me much of a choice," he pressed a soft kiss to his forehead. "I thought you should at least know." When Harry looked up, his sun kissed cheeks were covered in salty tears. Harry coughed and sputtered angrily, "you—I missed you so much—you ass—and you just are what, the President's successor? The same president that started all of this shit? Tom?"

He said nothing, only holding Harry. Basking in the warmth of his body, almost like a cold snake.

"You looked enchanting, darling." Tom told Harry who began to flush a pink. "Last night."

"Oh shut up, Tom. You looked alright yourself."

Tom shook his head, "not as much as you. Don't kid yourself about that."

Neither said anything for a good minute, only holding each other as they enjoyed their company. Harry buried his head into his chest, Tom only relaxing against the bed whilst they got used to the feeling of being with one another again. Leaning back, making the first move, Tom moved his hand into Harry's curls, lifting the ones at his bangs so he would be able to see his face better. The emerald eyes open and

Tom feels bitter at the angry red tinge around his eyes. The exhaustion was leaking out of Harry and Tom picked him up. “Hey,” he shouted at him - whacking his forearm lightly, “what are you doing?”

He didn’t say anything but decided to draw Harry a bath like he did Remus but made sure he was more relaxed and warm, comforted whilst he helped. Harry watched, flustered. “Tom, I’m not seven anymore. You don’t need to help me—“

“Harry,” he kisses the back of his hand, the teenager stuttering at the moment. “You’re exhausted; I’m happy to at least clean you to make sure you’re feeling less tense.”

And Tom does.

Over the past few days than he’s had in years, Tom’s cleaned more people than ever. Harry, the first time. Remus, the second. And Harry again. Using all the practice he’s gained, he was able to look after Harry and wrap him up in a fluffy robe afterwards where they both chilled in Harry’s bed. Harry laid there, staring up at Tom’s eyes, hand on his cheek - studying him obsessively. “Tom,” he began, the slightly hungover teenager humming. “What have you been doing over the years?”

“Over the…” he pauses, thinking. “I’ve been reading, like normal. And been socialising amongst the elite ranks of Panem; however, none of their company’s compare to yours.” He said honestly. Tom ranked his eyes over his face, studying every micro expression Harry had. Both of them flushed at his comment. “Harry… I… I want to know what happened after I left the orphanage.”

Harry took a harsh inhale, Tom not turning his gaze away from him. He was too interested in knowing than to turn back now. Harry avoided his gaze but still kept his hand on his cheek. As if to tell him not to retreat. Tom wouldn’t dare. “I still remember that dainty little note you wrote for me…” again, he took another harsh breath, before shaking his head at a grim thought. “I will tell you since I might die but—“

“You’re not going to die, Harry, *I* won’t allow it.” Tom says, but Harry glares up at him.

“You say that but you watch every year as the games go by, not doing a single thing.”

Tom blinked, trying to register the meaning of his words. “Harry,” he

shakes his head — wanting to ask if he was insane. “I couldn’t do anything about the games. And the games are more than *either of us* can handle on our own. You think that I can just help people every year to win? How fair is that?”

“*I don’t know,* Tom!” He sits up, eyeing him. “But allowing the games to happen…”

Tom notices the tears that drowns Harry’s face in fear and sorrow quicker than he can. He takes Harry’s hand from his face, placing his own on Harry’s — wiping away the tears. His boy bites his bottom lip hard, Tom raising his thumb so he could release the pressure he was causing himself. “Harry,” Tom feels addicted to his name after not knowing it for years. As if it was a secret in its own right. “I—I understand why you’re mad. But I wouldn’t be alive if I did something as reckless as try and save a tribute from the Games. What I’m doing now, with you, is completely absurd in all of the rights I’ve been given from the Capitol.” Harry’s eyes don’t break from him now, only watching with more questions. “I hate to say this but I don’t have the power yet to do anything besides stay in-line when it comes to the President. One step and I can say goodbye to everything. But you,” Tom moves his knees on the bed closer to Harry and bends his head so it relaxes against his chest. “I’m trying for you.”

Harry shuttered, placing a hand onto his shoulder. “I’m—I’m not sure *how* I can win.”

He looked up at Tom with an absurd amount of strength behind his eyes. “My godfather, he’s the one who helped me get out of the orphanage. He taught me how to wield a knife and other… things,” he gulped, before shaking his head. “I don’t think I could kill anyone, Tom. I—I’ve never wanted or—“ Tom knew this was going to be an issue since Harry was going to be put into the arena where he would be forced to kill people, but Tom knew this was just Harry. As much as Tom could say don’t kill someone, or kill someone for yourself: Harry wouldn’t be able to stand behind the decision. It reminded him of the time Harry and Tom came across a dying baby bird and Harry wanted to nurse it back to health then allow Tom to let it out of its misery.

He interrupted him, “Harry. Whether you kill anyone or not, I’m still going to be here. I’m going to be here to help you. You’re not alone and no matter whether you do or you don’t, I’m going to try my best to make sure I do everything in my power for you to stay alive.” He wraps an arm around Harry’s back, and uses his other to gently hold

his side. “Harry, those skills will not go to waste. Use them to be able to make yourself food, defend yourself, hunt. They’re going to be some of your greatest assets.” He glances up at the clock in the room. Four o’clock. Nine minutes over.

Tom turns back to him. “Now, I’m going to be your greatest asset outside of the arena. Doing what your *dog-of-a-man mentor*—“ he sneers “—is supposed to help you with.”

“Remus?” Harry tilts his head. “He’s a good man.”

“Not if he’s about to drink himself sick, allowing you to die. I won’t permit it.”

Harry shakes his head. “He lost so many people, Tom. Like I did. You—you won’t get him because the President took everything away from him, like me.” Harry wraps his arms around his shoulders. “He lost me.”

A headache about to kick in, Tom looks down to search for the meaning of that sentence in Harry’s eyes. “What do you mean by that?”

Harry bit his lip hesitantly again. He had a horrible habit in doing so, an indent in his poor bottom lip. “My parents—they’re from 2, Tom.” His eyes widened, but he continued to listen earnestly. “They were a part of some rebellious groups. Until they met my godfather, who was forced to become a peacekeeper after doing some stupid things in the Capitol. They became friends and left all as peacekeepers to 12. Remus Lupin was their friend when they arrived and they did everything together.” Tom found not a single lie in his words, able to read people extremely well. “Then, the fake contract was over and my parents, my godfather had to leave. Back to the Capitol. With me, a baby. Then, the President found out about the crime my parents had committed.” Tears wielded in Harry’s eyes, Tom blinking in disbelief. “The rest is history.”

Tom nodded his head, conflictingly. It was great they both hated the President—or else their friendship would be much harder to manage.

Harry’s parents were killed by the President (most likely) in the form of peacekeepers. He ended up in the same orphanage as Tom. Tom was picked from the President, he wrote a note to Harry mentioning the President. No wonder, he left. If he knew the President had not only taken one of the only children who had spoken to him as a kid; but had knowledge of all the residents in the orphanage. He left

because it was the only thing to do to keep safe. Tom held his cheek. “You are one of the cleverest people I know, Harry. I know you’ll win the games from that simple fact. It won’t be cunning or desperation; it will be from the fact of your excellent survival. Your instincts are unmatched, and that is why *you’ll* win.”

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Title: Enchanted
Memorable Lyrics
"There I was again tonight,
Forcing laughter, faking smiles
Same old tired, lonely place,
Walls of insecurity,
Shifting eyes and vacancy,
Vanished when I saw your face
All I can say is it was enchanting to meet you"
AND
"This is me praying that
This was the very first page
Not where the storyline ends
My thoughts will echo your name
Until I see you again
These are the words I held back
As I was leaving too soon
I was enchanted to met you"
*note: I felt like this was thee song for the tribute's parade, like c'mon.
Alternative Chapter Title: Bad Romance by Lady Gaga (probably)
Word Count: 8k

Thanks for a little over 200 hits, you guys, and the kudos + subscriptions!
Lmk what you think about this chapter, sorry it was a little late - I was quite busy & sick today
Up next, Question...?
P S

Question...? & 22

Chapter Notes

Posted: 4th of February, 2024

This fanfic is dedicated to my dad who tries to do the best for my sister and I, even if he's lost sometimes
Luv u dad and I appreciate what you do for us

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tom woke up to the sound of rustling. Blinking dazedly, he watched Harry wince down at him. The sixteen year-old whispered, “I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to wake you.” Tom sat up, yawning and wiping his eyes knowing he was in the company of someone who wasn’t going to judge him like the media or the Knights of Walpurgis. He follows Harry into the hallway but carefully evaluates the living room, noticing the lack of the female tribute but Fleur and Remus eating at the table. Harry, joining them, took a seat on a seat that was farthest away from the two of them. Thinking about the chance Sedge was to show up, he went back into the bedroom and decided to take a shower.

The water ran down his back, warm, and he grabbed his favourite brand of showering bottles and began to lather himself with them. He watched his phone light up with a call on the bathroom counter and he cringed, glaring at the sound notification. Wiping his hand with a towel, he reached across the dry floor — dripping and grabbed his phone, he answered the call. “What?”

The shriek of Bella’s voice was not at all telling. “Tom!” She cackled, “there’s a fight!”

“Oh my—” he scrunched up his nose in annoyance and to reduce the cursing that was about to come out of his mouth. “Why, when, where, and just what is happening?” Bella was enthusiastic to tell him all the details. When he heard Evans name, he cringed, knowing it couldn’t at all be good. Someone (he wasn’t told their name yet) in their homeroom decided to say something bad about him, whilst he wasn’t there to hear it, and Evans defended his honour. As a result, a massive fight occurred leaving the other student with a concussion, broken nose, and broken leg. Tom looked at himself in the mirror, sighing into the phone. “How’s Evans?”

Bella snickered. “We're in the nurse’s office at the moment, Evans isn’t better for wear, mind you. Two broken fingers, five broken ribs, a stab wound on running down his face - from a pencil, and a sprained foot. He was almost stabbed in the eye too!”

“Put him on the phone.”

Tom heard the phone crackle with static and stepped more out of the shower, despite the phone being waterproof. When it reached Evans, he choked and people began to shout and panic, Tom wondering what had just happened. “T—T-Tom?”

He only hummed, leaning his arm against the glass panel of the shower. “Just why did you do that, Evans?” Tom tsked and relaxed his head against his upper arm. Evans whimpered on the other end of the phone and Tom decided to show him some mercy, ignoring what happened the other night between them for the time being. The members of the Knights of Walpurgis were much more valuable to him than some petty (and yes, annoying) fight they had between them. “Evans, I’m not angry; I just wanted to know.”

The teenager wasn’t able to give Tom much of a response, a mature womanly voice on the other end saying that he needed to get that pesky phone away from him so they could try and help his wounds. Tom thought about what he should say to the scared teenager but he knew Harry would be a much better spokesperson than him. But then again, he’s not supposed to be with Harry so who would get into the most trouble then?— knowing Evans has loose lips.

“Hey, Evans.” He said softly. “Get the help you need, do not resist.”

“But—I-I—“

“Do not argue with me. Shush.”

The other end of the phone fell silent and Tom realised he hung up on him. Sighing, and turning his attention towards the rustle at the door; Tom flushed at the fact Harry was staring at him. His eyes were narrowed toward his face but Tom could see the pinkness of him decorating his tanned skin. Tom decided to ask, “do you have any idea on what I should do about my classmates?”

Harry shrugged his shoulders, leaning against the wall. “What happened?”

“Some fit over me, I’m presuming.” Tom decides that since neither of

them being naked has caused any issues, he'd go back to washing himself. The steam of the shower helped cover him as well, turning back to the faucet. "You know," he turned his head to Harry, seeing his not so impressed expression, "I'm not very well-liked amongst many circles."

"Oh no. Really, Tom?" He scoffed sarcastically, crossing his arms. "It's as if we didn't go to the same orphanage together."

Tom rolled his eyes. The nerve of him.

He grabbed the vanilla conditioner and began to spread it amongst his hair. "For a little context, I've created a group of students called the Knights of Walpurgis who have shown the most promise with helping me once I become the President—and one of my members, Evans, tried to defend my honour stupidly." Again, he felt the room quieten behind him before he heard Harry bark out a laugh.

"'Stupidly,' Tom?" He snapped his head to him. "I know you and you relish that thought."

The smug grin on Harry's face deterred him from breaking him apart, but knowing Harry; he also knew that fact. Harry chuckled under his breath a little further, Tom ignoring him to wash his hair. His childhood best friend hummed. "Evans, did you say his name was?—First name or last?"

"First." Tom supplied. "Evans' full name is Evans Aosta Fuse."

"Oh, so why is he of your disinterest then? He's a part of your group, is he not?"

He yanks his towel and wraps it around his hips. Tom shrugged with boredom. "Evans is a particular person. Why he tries to defend me like he has has only caused him to get into trouble. I wouldn't go through the trouble for him so—"

"Ah, that's it." Harry snapped his fingers at him. "He likes you."

"What?"

It wasn't a conclusion Tom was unaware of already but for Harry to say it outright made Tom flush with a combination of flattery and annoyed confrontation he's been avoiding for months now. Harry smirked lazily, eyeing Tom as if he knew exactly what he was talking about. He moved forward and Tom didn't stop him when he faced him

to the mirror, the older teenager behind his back as he touched his shoulders lightly, manoeuvring him so he was facing himself. “Now, Tom Riddle. If you could imagine. Perhaps, he has a crush on you. And if I know you correctly, the girl—what was her name again? I don’t know,” Harry was rambling on and Tom was utterly confused as to what he was talking about, until he understood. “But she had a major crush on you and you kept stomping on her feelings. Besides me, maybe, it was probably the first nice thing a girl’s done anything to you but still—you disregarded her and ignored her feelings.”

He grumbled, “and this was what, ten years ago back when I was eight?”

“Technically nine, I was eight.”

“Those little details don’t really matter, Harry.”

“To me it does,” and Harry swiped his arm in the air hurriedly, bothered. “Regardless, you were dismissive and to me, it sounds like this Evans was trying to do something because he likes you and you don’t pay attention to many people unless they do deeds for you. And unfortunately, because you don’t know how to express your unfortunately un-attraction to this particular man—there is an obvious strain in your guys’ relationship as friends and uncomfortableness amongst the group.” Tom glared at Harry in the mirror who only smirked back. “Sounds about right?”

All Tom could say was a soft, “it’s not only him though.”

Harry blinked, not meeting his eye in the mirror. “It’s not only him?”

“Yes,” he hisses. “It’s Bella, it’s fucking Nott, I reckon Barty’s got some weird fucking thing for me—“ Harry snorted before holding one of his shoulders and covering the rest of his face with his other free hand. The teenager murmured, “sounds to me as if you’ve got some tough luck Tom, but I don’t exactly think it’s surprising.”

“What do you mean?”

Harry snickered, eyeing him before blinking confused. “You’re quite conventionally attractive.”

“Does that mean—“

“I just stating the truth.”

Harry interrupts his train of thought and changes the conversation back onto the previous question Tom had asked. “If you want my opinion, I think you should stroll up to your school and tell this Evans that you're uninterested in getting together with him,” Tom bit his inner-cheek but was somewhat comforted in knowing Harry had no interest in seeing anything bloom between him and Evans anyway. The teenager watched him somewhat studying him, Tom found. Not that he himself was doing anything different. “Also,” Harry purred knowingly. “The best way to make those friends of yours uninterested in pursuing you is if you’re already taken. Worked before with me,” Tom’s chest tightening with sharper breaths, “and you’re something nobody wants to touch if already claimed. Get what I mean?”

Tom spun around to him. “What do you mean that it’s worked before —who have you been with?”

“Numerous people.”

Again, Tom bit his inner-cheek, staring down at the shorter teenager. “Who?”

Harry snickered and found his question to be something to laugh at, he went over to the sink and began to brush his teeth. As a form of continuous, he followed along with him and kept staring at him until he began to answer. “Once at 12, my godfather—“ his words were mumbled and slurred as he continued to talk through the brush, “signed me up for primary and secondary school. Until my birth name, knowing that regardless of whether the President found us or not; there wouldn’t be much he could do about it since I was already at 12 and—“ he spat out a large majority of his toothpaste. Tom continued to look at him through the mirror. “There, I met a few kids I liked. Only two of them were romantic interests I followed after, but the rest were outside the group.”

“Who were you with Harry?”

“Be careful, Tom. You’re sounding a lot like Evans,” he teased.

Harry went on. “My first girlfriend was with a girl called Ginny. She was my best friend’s sister, but that didn’t work after a month since we were both more interested in other people. My first boyfriend was with a guy out of our group named Alva. He was a bit older but honestly, it wasn’t something unusual. Then, a few other girlfriends and boyfriends.” His childhood best friend shrugged and continued on like it wasn’t the biggest news in the world to Tom. “My most serious

relationship was with another guy called Nathaniel—'Than' for short, and my longest relationship was with a girl called Seretta. Although, she was much older."

Tom found himself struck with a bath-(a)plentiful-filled with crazed emotions. Harry took one look at him in the mirror, laughed, and then said. "You want to know everything, don't you?—We really do have a lot to catch up on." He spat out the rest of his toothpaste, Tom doing the same swiftly. Tom decided to ask, "how much older?"

"What?" Harry blinked, somewhat taken aback.

"You and this Seretta woman."

"Oh, me and her." The older teenager nodded before thinking, a hand on his chin demonstrating the sheer reference of truth in his previous statement. "I think she was almost nineteen when we first started to date. I was turning fifteen, I think. Although, she knew me quite well and we meshed well."

"Eighteen and forteen?"

"More or less."

Tom slapped a hand to his face. In the Capitol, teenagers didn't usually date until they turned thirteen and even then, they wouldn't date someone four years older than them. Even if Harry was a year older, two almost. Seventeen, nineteen—it didn't matter. It still was an old age gap to thirteen and fifteen. Tom followed Harry back out to the bedroom where they found themselves suitably seated on the bed after Tom hurriedly changed, he wanted to know everything. He asked his most wanted question: "how many partners have you had?" Apparently, it was a difficult question to answer for his sole childhood companion.

Harry's expression was nothing but interchangeably expressive. "Twelve, no—maybe fifteen if we're counting the summer of '45 but still even then." Tom flushed at that comment. "But, the Marauders' dance that night. Mmm—" he shrugged his shoulders. "Like nine girlfriend, boyfriends. About maybe twenty or so actual flings."

"So like twenty-nine relationships."

"Not so relationships, Tom." Harry rolled his eyes. "The twenty or so were flings."

Harry explained further, “I started dating when I was about eleven. Ginny was my girlfriend and mind you, she was only a year younger than me and her brother’s my age. I, then, began to date Alva. He was kinda cute but he was from the Merchants and his mother didn’t like us together. But honestly, nobody really cared besides her. Then, it was Rankin when I was twelve. Arlia when I turned thirteen. Keziah also when I was thirteen. During the ’45 summer, I turned fourteen and met some blokes—although they were quite charming.”

“How old were they?” Tom felt like he had to ask.

“Around twenty or so.”

He coughed at the age, but Harry didn’t say anything negative about the maturity gap and Tom couldn’t say anything, because Harry had this childish glint in his eye that felt like he couldn’t say anything bad about the age. At least, not yet. Harry was about to go into the Hunger Games and Tom wasn’t going to bicker about something so unimportant beforehand. Perhaps, no—they will discuss it later after he comes out of the games, alive. Only then, he tells himself.

Harry didn’t stop. “So, that was that until the Marauders had another party night where I met their guitarist, Seretta. Her name actually is Sandaline Lovie but that was her mother’s name she hated so she renamed herself Seretta. ‘Ser’ or ‘Ret’ for short. Anyway, we dated until the 72nd Reaping when she broke up with me ‘cause her little brother, Orrin was reaped. He was twelve and sang for the Marauders. Everyone was a bit heartbroken over his death so it was no surprise, really.”

“Then, afterwards I couldn’t hold a relationship for long so I had a few flings. I was a Seam kid so the Merchant kids were quite attached to me. I also lived part-time with Ginny and her brother, Ron’s family. They have a lot of kids for your knowledge and at some point, I got with Charlie. Actually, he might—no nevermind,” Harry shook his head, “he was also a fling. Nevermind.”

“What were you about to say?”

“That he might be my oldest relationship. I was about to turn sixteen and he was twenty-three.” Laying on his cheek, beside Harry, watching him be conflicted over all the age ranges in his relationships was a complex sight for Tom to see. Especially after he thought Harry had been with no one before the reaping. Oh how he was wrong; and utterly annoyed by that fact. “But we didn’t date, so… nothing came

about it. Anyway, I met ‘Than when I was first newly introduced to 12 and was Sirius’ ward. Apparently, a woman called Mary McDonald who was once a Marauder had three children before her passing, one of which; ‘Than. He is a year older than me, and we dated for like six months. We started dating like two months after Seretta.” He questioned himself, Tom hearing the tone in his voice clearly. “And he was actually like my messiest breakup.”

“Not pretty on his or yours?” He found himself asking.

“Both, honestly. Although… that’s ‘cause we still like each other.”

“Huh?” That made Tom more pissed off.

Harry shrugs his shoulders as if that statement meant nothing. “‘Than was… complicated as was I. Um, it made things in the house complicated too and his two sisters, Abelene and Sibyl were all too invested in us and we have been living together since I was 12 so; actually, I moved in with the Weasleys after that.” Tom commented, “you’ve been busy since I’ve been gone.”

The teenager wrinkled his eyelids because of concentration at him. “Well yes. Unless you’d like to ask me about coal and whatever rebellion shit is happening, relationships have kept me busy. Nothing else much to do in 12 especially since you guys don’t need us.”

Us. The way Harry said “us” made Tom wither.

It was “us” against him.

Tom. The Capitol. And especially, the President.

Harry didn’t include himself as the Capitol despite living the first ten or so years of his life here. Tom found that knowledge both understandable and degrading to his teeth. Harry laid his head up against Tom’s cheek. “My last two partners were a bit of a wreck too. Orrin was nothing but an asshole to me and we lasted a month. And Isabeau only used me for sex, if I’m going to be totally honest with you. Also to get over her ex, Peach, but that’s only other meaningless details.” He swiped his hand exhaustedly into the air. “And what about you, Mr. Successor? No relationships.”

“I—I don’t need to be in a relationship.”

Harry scoffed. “Whether you like it or not, Tom, the President will want to see you have a successor of your own. Whether it be in ten

years, twenty, thirty, or forty; at some point he'll want you to have kids. Regardless of your personal feelings on the matter. A man like that is no good, Tom." He trails a hand up to his face and presses it against his cheek. "Find a friend and date. It'll only do you good."

"But you mean a women, don't you—"

"I mean a friend, regardless of sex; adoption, like you, is always an option."

Tom understood what he meant. An heir was important. Especially to secure his position as President. Although, blood or not; he felt repulsed by the thought of raising a child. Wife, husband, solo. No matter what. Harry bore his eyes up at him. "Regardless, Tom. Having kids is what is going to make the President jump off your back. And you'll get the luxuries of ruling alone. You might even get to kill him subtly if the chance arises." But that did seem promising.

Unfortunately, he found the underlying factors of that statement to be bitter on his tongue and making him more anxious. He didn't want kids; even though having them would be the best politically. He didn't want a wife or husband; love repulsed him—he shuttered under Harry's hand.

A question was blurted from his tongue before he could stop himself. "What did your friends think when you were reaped?"

Harry paused, sighing before continuing to stroke his cheek—raising his hand so it ended up in his perfectly combed and gelled hair. Messing it all up, but Tom said nothing. "Sirius, 'Than, Abe, and Sib were all there for my first two minutes. 'Than was quite quiet during it but understandably so. He hugged me for a bit and kissed my cheek goodbye. The girls were distraught but allowed a few seconds for Than and I. Sirius was all over telling me what to do, but honestly, I wasn't paying him any attention. The second two were taken up by the Weasleys. Unfortunately not all of them could turn up. Bill and Arther had to return back to work, and Charlie bid me a goodbye hurriedly before turning too. Ginny and Ron hugged me for a while. The twins, Fred and George also told me to prank the other tributes as hard as I could. And to make sure to have fun with my interview with Barty and to mention them." Harry had no complaints when Tom lifted him and slipped underneath Harry to hold him up and let him relax against him. Harry still touched his cheek fondly. "Mrs Weasley was a mess. Poor Molly. And Percy told me to take this with me."

The teenager raised a note to Tom. “Can I read it?”

“Yes,” and Tom began to read it whilst Harry explained what he wrote on it. “Apparently, Percy spent a few minutes after hearing I was reaped—and used the time between my first goodbye to fastly write this up, and throughout the meeting with his family and at the end, gave it to me. I find it’s going to be my token in the arena, I think. I really don’t want to lose it.”

The note read; ‘To Harry, dying is not an option for you. I don’t care if you’re wanting to save a 12 year-old or give up to an 18 year-old. You’re not dying. You have a lot to live for. My family; my mother, your pseudo-mother, and my father, shared amongst us all. Bill. Charlie. Me. Fred. George. Ron. And Ginny. Not to mention, Sirius, Nathaniel, Abelene, and Sibyl. The Marauders are going to miss you too. But you’re not going to die. You’re going to tell us all about your Capitol experience. Your suits, your fancy bathrooms and bedrooms. The tributes (allies) you meet on the way. All the experiences you had, good and bad. You’re going to tell us everything because we’re not going to let you die. Not in our hearts or souls. Remus, that lousy man is going to help you. Sirius said so. So it will happen. Neville, Hermione, that loser of a kid; Hosea, Larkin, and Estle. Even Ruby, that bitch for goodness sake! Will all be cheering for you to come back home. 12 isn’t going to diminish, it’s only going to grow more fiery watching you. Put on a good show for us. Do whatever you can; we’re not going to hate you for it. Be mean, be false, lie. Harry. Everyone is going to be amazed when District 12 has their next victor. You. And about Sedge, she’ll understand. She isn’t going to be gunning for you immediately. She knows. District 12 don’t go after their own unless they absolutely have to. You know that. Sincerely, but this isn’t a goodbye. Percy and the Weasley Family. And everyone else I said on this fucking sorrow list. You’re not dying, Harry Potter. I won’t allow it.’

“This is…” Tom doesn’t know how to put it into words. “Brilliant and understandably ugly.”

“Oh gosh, don’t you know. I did poetry with this bastard during my fourth year. I know it’s all emotionally full but… it’s Percy. It might not be the smoothest thing, but it’s more than anyone has done for me in terms of words. And I think, more than anything; words are going to be my token in the area. It’ll remind me of home. And at least that someone wants me home. No matter what.”

Tom glances at the weak sheet of paper. He wonders if he can find a

small wallet (that can be clipped onto his uniform) the Gamemakers will allow into the arena so it doesn't get saturated and destroyed. He gives it back to Harry, he'll keep it in mind. Glancing at his phone, Tom curses. "Fuck, I'm late." He kisses Harry quickly on the forehead. So much time passed whilst they were talking, he pointed at him. "You're going to be late too if you don't head off soon, okay?"

In his uniform already, he grabs his bag of essentials, wondering how the fuck he was going to get out of the building without being seen and turns again to Harry. Sedge could be out there waiting for him already. "You're going to have to leave before me."

"Yeah, I thought that might be the case. Am I going to see you again tonight?"

"Of course," he nods his head. "Make sure to find as much information about things as you can. Plants, terrains—and how to survive them, the basic survival skills which I actually don't think you'll have too much of an issue with being from 12, but still, regardless. Find information about the tributes, their different skills, personalities, everything; Harry."

Harry snorted at him, patting his shoulder. "I'll be okay, Tom. I just hope I don't fuck it up too much."

"With what, getting into trouble?"

"I have a knack for it, it seems."

Tom rolled his eyes, "don't use that as an excuse. I'll see you."

Harry leaves and Tom waits until he no longer sees either tributes out in the dining area. He heads towards the elevator and texts Francisca to meet him out the back. And she does. The woman is not pleased to see him and makes a few irrelevant comments about it before driving him to school. Upon getting there, the police (internal law) are there and so are the parents of the students. The principal, McGonagall, meets him upon his arrival. "Mr. Riddle," she began, leading him down the hallway towards the nurse's office. "Due to your reputation, two of my students have been caught fighting over you, viciously. I need you to help fix the issues, as your indirect effects have been a cause of them."

"Of course, McGonagall."

Their elitist high-school (the best in all of Panem) was called The

Academy. Started up by the four founders; Salazar Slytherin, Rowena Ravenclaw, Godric Gryffindor, and Helga Hufflepuff back during the beginning years after the Dark Days. Their school, to all the students and professors, had magical-like qualities to the design. Not overly surprising since it was Panem but the features were stunning to Tom even back when he enrolled a few years prior. The main corridor (dubbed the "Hogwarts' Corridor" due to a student called Duke Hogwarts causing the biggest prank in their school's history back in '92) was exceedingly high. Reaching the 8th floor before the roof connected with the rest of the floors, all the floors below had windows so the students could see who was below and in the rooms opposite them. Additionally, the Academy had dorm rooms that the students were allowed to stay in which connected from the campus through tubes in the air.

Their campus had a medieval castle design from the outside but inside, it was all modern. Tom didn't mind and followed Mcgonagall towards the nurse's office. Stepping up the marble stairs, he looked up and noticed the few students overlooking him as he followed their principal. It was a few minutes walk to the nurse's office but when he arrived outside the door, Bella raced up to him. "Tom!" She hugged him and he awkwardly and uncomfortably stood there as she sobbed to him. "His condition has gotten worse."

"What?" He raised his eyebrow when Bella stepped back, holding his forearms softly.

Narcissa came up beside her, and Nott, Lucius, and Lestrange were standing off besides the two women. McGonagall watched interestedly but Narcissa spoke out loud. "Yes," she hisses. "Blood has reached his lungs due to his ribs, it's bad, Tom." Narcissa takes him out of her sister's hold and brings him to sit down next to her. She points her index finger into his shoulder, whispering. "Where were you?"

He thought about lying to her but knew it probably wouldn't bring him the outcome he desired. "I was at the tributes' centre trying to converse with the victors. You know," he began when her eyes were widened, "I didn't think Evans would get assaulted on my second day off."

"Regardless, Tom." Her hooded eyes narrowed. "He needs your help. We all do."

"With what?—All our assessments aren't until late September. The term is about to end in a couple of weeks. Then, we get a month off

because we're about to become seniors and then, our exams are next May. None of you really need my help." And Tom had better things to do.

Narcissa pulled out her phone and began to scroll through her social media until she found the post she was looking for. It was under an anonymous name that made no sense but it said in the caption: "the President's successor is a—" Tom widened his eyes at the damaging word it associated with him. A slur, and entirely uncalled for. Narcissa studied him as he observed the message and the comments underneath it in the comment section. "Tom," she began. "That teenager who Evans—"

"Was this guy?" Tom pointed his index finger to the phone. "The child who wrote that?"

"A year below us, in Professor Laurentius' homeroom. Bellamy Hav-Septava. Regulus, my cousin found out and told Bella and Evans first. This morning, without my knowledge. The two of them went down to Laurentius' homeroom and began this fight with Hav-Septava." She took a deep breath before turning her gaze back to Tom. "This is how this all started. Honestly though," she turned her attention back to her sister who scratched her neck nervously, "you should have known better." Narcissa hissed under her breath.

McGonagall gave them all one sharp look before moving towards the large door. "You six stay here and do not cause any more trouble than you already have. Do I make myself clear?"

They all give her a sign of confirmation before she leaves them alone. It was as if McGonagall was handing the responsibility of keeping them all in-check to him. Narcissa crossed her arms, leaning back against the chair, Tom still looking at the comments of the post. "Does the President know of this incident yet?"

"I wouldn't be surprised."

Fuck. Fuck.

Tom hasn't been at school for the past two days. And his Knights of Walpurgis have been confirming with the President that he has been, alongside them, but that he's been staying at their houses' after-school. He's completely ruined of his plans with Harry unless he's able to keep his lack of school hidden from him. He bites his bottom lip. Turning to his phone, he hands Narcissa's back to her, and begins to call the only person who he thinks can help him at this moment. He

stands up and walks to the door, leaving the five by themselves. “Francisca,” he begins the minute she picks up. “I need your help.”

He leaned up against the wall in another corridor that had no one else in it. “What’s wrong, Tom?” She asks, Tom immediately jumps her with his reply. “I need you to get Harry a phone. If the President figures out I haven’t been at school but at the tributes’ centre, he’s going to make me stay in my room until the entire fiasco of the 74 games is over. I cannot let that happen, France.”

She harshly inhales. “Okay, I can do that for you Tom. What model would Harry want?”

“A simple 25’. We had those back in the orphanage.”

She agrees and begins to head over to the store since she was already at their biggest shopping centre in Panem. Francisca tilts her head, and speaks into the phone clearly. “For now, you should stay at the Academy and make yourself useful by playing the part of a sick kid. If you're sick, they’re not going to want you there. Don’t even begin to try the crying act, Tom. Your devious principal, McGonagall knows you well enough that you won’t resort to that unless you were really desperate, sweetheart. Try just pretending to be sick. Your girl, Bella. She would have those sick pills, wouldn’t she? Go ask her one. I’ll fix you up tonight.”

Right—those would work. Tom doesn’t even ask for a pill, he demands to have one and takes it from her without drinking any water. Nott gives him a shocked expression, one that doesn’t look keen on allowing him to do something such as this to himself but desperate times ask for desperate measures. Lestrange raises an eye at the action, and Lucius only sucks up to his girlfriend by allowing him to do so without adversity. He waits, and waits until the pills take effect. Narcissa asks, “what if you see the President?” After he takes the pills.

To that, he answers. “Then, I’ll say I was sick whilst at school.”

“Alright,” she sighs. “But I think this is a big situation of miscommunication, you know.”

Tom blinks, being handed the water bottle Narcissa was scouring around in her school bag for, the teenager beginning to feel the effects of the pill. He cringed and drank the water. She continued on with what she was saying before he even had to ask. “You and Evans.” Narcissa whispered. “You and Nott. Tom, I do think that you’ve got to tell them you don’t—“

Their heads snapped to where the large door cracked open and McGonagall walked out. Sniffling, Tom watched her as she glanced around at the group. “Mr. Riddle, Mr. Rosier is asking for you. The rest of you are allowed to come, Mr. Rosier confirmed.” However, she did give Nott a harsh observation before Narcissa took his arm under hers and helped him into the nurse’s office. Feeling unstable and annoyed, Tom glanced through all the different sections that were cut off by curtains before they arrived at Evans’.

There, he saw the broken state of Evans.

Bella wasn’t wrong in how she described him.

The facial stab wound ran down from Evans’ right eyebrow, down his nose, all the way to Evans’ left cheek where the most damage was done. Additionally, there was another bandage that was underneath his eye, near his eye bag where Tom thought where he was nearly stabbed in the eye. He coughed, feeling his chest tense. Tom winced and moved forward more with the help of Narcissa. Evans’ also had his entire chest covered in bandages where they had done quick surgery on him an hour or so ago, Tom’s Knights waiting for when they’d be allowed to come back inside as he rested. His foot was wrapped up too and so were his fingers. From where he sprained his foot and broke his fingers.

Evans’ beckoned him over as Narcissa placed Tom on the bed with assistance. The drugs in the pill were making his head blasted with pain as he tried to register what Evans was blabbering about. He was hardly able to concentrate when Evans’ sat up, Tom feeling the shift underneath the bed sheets. At one point, Evans’ put his hand on his jaw and then—

Tom’s eyes widened, glancing down at Evans and his chapped lips as they were over his. He blinked a few times before realising what was happening, feeling panicked. The distant sound of laughter didn’t help as he stretched his neck, turning around to see Bella somewhat laughing with a broken look. Lucius snickering beside Lestrange, Narcissa horrified, whilst Nott stared concentrated and sorrowful. Tom shivered, a hand at the base of his back, about to pull him back around when he got up—Narcissa hurrying over, not wanting a heartbeat to help him.

Noises in the room broke and Tom watched as Lucius and Lestrange went over to Evans and patted and clapped his back as Narcissa hurried him out of the curtain surrounded area and out of the nurse’s

office. He was horrified and mortified, Tom holding onto Narcissa for dear life. He was swept away and he wanted to ask a question. A lot of questions. But he wasn't allowed to as the memories of what had just happened spun around in his head again.

The pill. The kiss. The laughter. The clapping.

His mouth was dry and he found himself in the girl's lavatory as Narcissa sat him down on the girl's changing bench, fetching paper towels and water. At one point, a girl called Victoria who was Yaxley's younger sister in Bellamy's year group hovered over Tom, holding the paper towel to his forehead. Since she was acquainted with the Knights of Walpurgis through her brother, Tom said nothing and accepted her company as Narcissa went somewhere unheard of to Tom. Then, Victoria—the girl who was recognised to Tom as the girl who kissed Greengrass' brother in their second year of middle school; and additionally, Greengrass' best friend since she was also in the year younger. He wondered what he was doing there as a group of girls began to arrive inside. One shouted at Tom's presence, who was not a member or associated with the Knights of Walpurgis until the shouting stopped and the girls began to observe him.

"The pill" was mentioned a few times, and he had one of the girls touching his perfect hair—he was about to bite of her hand before she removed it with swiftness, Victoria saying something to her before someone else besides her grabbed another paper towel that was wet and placed it on his hair. Tom thought he fell asleep at some point and he woke up again, still horribly sick and body, disgusted. He fell to the ground of the bathroom, another girl shouting loudly into his ear before he raced to the toilet before he vomited.

Someone grabbed his hair, Tom looking up to notice it was Narcissa again, and allowing her to hold him whilst he vomited bile since he had a lack of breakfast. Then, afterwards, he leaned up against the stall, dazed. She flushed the toilet and stared down at him. Her words were coherent as he blinked up at her. "Those pills Bella had were way too strong. Like—troublesomely strong. You shouldn't have taken them."

He said nothing but allowed her and Victoria to pick him up and wipe the vomit from his face as did the girls, who he recognised as Clio Pembroke, Ildikó Vial, Altynai Brault, and a boy; who Tom recognised to be Šimon Novák. The man of the group happened to be a teenager in Regulus' grade who was quite known to be vicious with politics, and extremely sexual for a fifteen year-old. Šimon reminded Tom a bit

of Harry's past, with how he explained his relationships this morning. Sitting on the counter, Šimon raised an eye at Tom. "Not so strong now, Riddle?"

He was smug and Narcissa bore her eyes at him. "Shut up, Novák, Tom didn't mean for this to happen."

"But he wanted to be sick for a reason?"

"S-shut up," he slurred at him.

"Kitty's got a bite."

Šimon laughed at him, crossing his left leg over his right, watching him. Tom didn't like the way Šimon looked at him as if he was something to eat. Narcissa cleared his face and Victoria grabbed Tom's shirt and told him to lift his arms up so she could take it off. And he listened, watching her as she began to wipe and wet his shirt to get rid of all the vomit stains. Ildikó began to spray the bathroom, muttering curses under her breath whilst Clio began to fix his hair. "My goodness, Tom." She shook her head. "You really got yourself into a pickle this time."

Tom glanced at what Altynai was doing, standing by the door. "What —who knows?"

Narcissa answered his question with sincerity. "I'm going to kill the boys."

Šimon took over and interrupted her. "Your little members of Knights of Walpurgis ended up telling their Class: 4, what had happened, and those guys ended up telling the rest of the school. You know how gossip ends up moving really quickly, Riddle."

Altynai's golden brown skin reminded him of Harry's and her nose ring was prominent. The gold telling of her family's wealth. Her voice rang out, "the door's locked. Nobody is going to be able to get inside and Sofía Pereyra Iraola is protecting the outside."

"What—what am I going to do? Does he know?"

Narcissa bit her bottom lip. "I'm sorry."

Fuck.

It wasn't long before the door was unlocked and a few female

professors Tom recognised and came inside. No one from the group locked inside cared enough to try and escape before they came and Tom was taken, half-asleep and barely conscious to the principal's office alongside the rest of the crew inside, Narcissa beside him—trying to keep him awake. Except, Tom really didn't want to be awake. The laughter kept biting a nerve at him and clapping. Tom hated clapping.

There, he found himself on a comfortable chair, leaning against Narcissa (trying not to show any other weakness, however) as McGonagall stared down at him and began to question the group about what had happened. Šimon snickered but then answered properly, saying he didn't know but that he was in there because of the news and wanted to help him out. The lies were woven, the looks were fierce but powerful, Tom felt vulnerable enough that he wanted to rip out his eyes. And that was until the President showed up.

Dumbledore, the man of his nightmares, came stalking into the room and Šimon, Clio, Ildikó, Altynai, Victoria, and Narcissa were all asked to leave and they all did besides Narcissa. She stayed by Tom's side, glaring at the President. "I'm staying," she told him but Dumbledore really couldn't give less of a shit—Tom could tell.

"Do what you want, girl, but I'm here not to talk to you but Tom."

"Do you think Tom really wants to speak with you, right now?" She hissed but Tom glared at her.

She was speaking out of turn.

Narcissa respected his discussion for her to shut the fuck up, and turned back to face the President. Dumbledore. The man Tom hated the most in the world, despite him being the sole man who adopted him. The ass. Dumbledore gave him the pitiful, 'unfortunate expression' he always gave him whenever he did something Dumbledore didn't like. Something he always expected to happen when it came to him; which Tom always got irritated by. Narcissa watched the exchange nervously. She didn't belong there, Tom knew.

"Ms. McGonagall has informed me, Tom, that you haven't been here for the past two days so where have you been?"

Tom bit his inner-cheek to keep himself from speaking out of turn like Narcissa. When the President finished, he sighed out an answer. "I've been sick," he sniffled. "I've been at the Blacks and my other friends' families' estates, recultivating. However, I had to come in today

because I heard there was a fight in my name and I had to fix it somehow—“ he glared at McGonagall who said nothing in return, and continued “and I got kissed, whilst sick, to someone who I have told before I don’t like but still—regardless, and I freaked. What about it?” He sneered.

If he was going to lie, he was going to lie passionately.

For Harry.

Dumbledore only gave him a harsh expression.

Fuck this old, conniving bastard.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Title: Question...?
Memorable Lyrics
"Can I ask you a question?
Did you ever have someone kiss you in a crowded room
And every single one of your friends was making funs of you
And 15 seconds later, they were clappin' too?
Then what do you do?"
-
This song in general matches the Capitol aspect of the Hunger Games
Alternative Chapter Title: Super Rich Kids by Frank Ocean + Earl Sweatshirt
Word Count: 7.4k

Thanks for 250+ hits and the kudos + subscriptions <3
Lmk what you think in the comments, I love reading them and responding to them
Up next... It's Nice To Have A Friend
P S

It's Nice To Have A Friend & New Romantics

Chapter Notes

Posted: 7th of February, 2024
:D

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The next day he woke up to a text.

‘What happened, Tom?’

Blinking, he licked his lips, wetting them before opening up his phone. It was from an unknown number but instinctively, he knew who had texted him. He called the anonymous number and leaned back on his bed inside of the President’s Mansion. “Hello Harry,” he answered—still with a pounding headache from the pill the day before. It was past school times, 5 o’clock and he still felt awful. And he wasn’t allowed to go anywhere. Dumbledore made sure he couldn’t go away, keeping Snape as his escort for anything and guards at his door. He was on lock down.

But, Francisca ended up completing his request - and he was able to talk to Harry. “I asked you before but I’ll say it again, what happened, Tom?” His soft voice asked into the phone. “I was trying to find out from Remus, but he said something unexpected. And Fleur told me that Francisca wanted her to give me this as a present from you. Tom, really?—A phone.”

“I knew I might’ve gotten into trouble with the phone thing and wouldn’t be able to escape the Mansion again, so I wanted to at least be able to talk to you, Harry.” Tom sniffled and rolled onto his stomach. He rested his head onto his cheek to stabilise him. “You’re still wanting to know what happened though, aren’t you?”

“Of course, we’re like best friends.”

Tom’s heart burned.

“Remember, Evans?” Harry hummed in agreement. “Well, he got injured as you know and he got worse when I got there so I waited for a bit and found out from a friend, the President knew I wasn’t at school so I decided to play the sick card with a sick pill. However, as it turns out, it was way too strong and the whole thing with Evans and

Bellamy happened because of some post about me; and Evans was defending me and trying to assault him with Bella. Regardless, I was sick when I met him again—he was probably really drugged up and then, took my presence as something to kiss." Harry gasped but Tom didn't stop, "and then Lucius and Lestrange laughed at me, and then congratulated Evans. It was a big mess. But Narcissa took me out of there."

"What the fucking hell, Tom."

"It gets worse."

"It does?"

"Yeah," he nodded but it wasn't as if Harry was going to be able to see that. He regressed. "Then, the bathroom incident happened and I was all high with the drugs of the pill and kept going in and out conscious—and then at one point, I vomited, and got it all over myself, and the girls in the bathroom helped me. And this fuck, Šimon couldn't stop teasing me—the dick. Anyway," but all Tom could hear on the other line was laughing. "Are… are you okay?"

Harry took a few moments to collect himself, but had a high tone in his voice as if he was trying to stop himself from bursting out again. "Yeah—yes, sorry. I just find it funny you swearing is all. Continue, I really want to know where it gets bad."

"Oh okay, then the President decided to show up."

"Oh."

He hummed, tightening his eyebrows together. "And now I'm on house arrest."

Tom heard shuffling on the other side of the phone.

Harry bore his eyes at the boring roof colour of his bedroom in the Tribute's Centre and wondered how, for a room with such complex colours, shapes, and unnecessary designs—the roof would be left alone and was the dullest colour in the place. Tom's breath on the other side of the phone was uneven and he would tell, without even needing to ask, he was going through it. Harry lifted an arm up into the air, wondering how far the roof was with his arm, knowing even instinctively he wouldn't be able to touch the roof but wanting to try anyway. Back at home, with a little distance from his bed, he would be able to touch his roof.

Deciding to recite to Tom the interesting developments in his own crazed life—he felt relaxed to know he at least had someone, who he knew he could trust, in the Capitol. The girl from District 2, Susan Bones, was one of the more interesting tributes Harry was thinking to be allies with but understood from all the conditioning from Sirius, not to trust anyone from the Career Districts. “Susan Bones told me she liked my hands today.”

Tom snorted, and Harry found himself grinning by the reaction from the younger teenager. It wasn’t something Tom Riddle, the boy he used to know, would do. It wasn’t something he did much now either but from the breathing, could tell he was trusting Harry more. Like they used to. “Why?”

“Something about my hands being the consequence of a trained tribute. However, I didn’t have the heart to tell her that I was just really clumsy as a kid.”

Harry laughed at the thought.

Back when he was eleven and first met Sirius on the train out of the Capitol, the man handed him a knife. Harry didn’t know how to use it, being Capitol-raised and all, and stabbed himself accidentally on the leg when he sat on it (sidewards) forgetting it was there. Sirius, then, had to carry him out of the train because Harry sprained his ankle jumping off of the train with the man before it got off at the checkpoint. All the small cuts on his hands were also by the supposedly electric fence of District 12 and the barbs on it.

Susan’s comment was something Harry found really funny. Tom sounded like he was leaning on something when he asked, “what else was interesting?” Harry recited to him that the girl from District 7 was getting more insane by the day and she was tormenting all the Career tributes; and that the boy from District 10, Ladislao, was extremely funny. He was born with both his eyes, he told Harry, but when he was around eight years-old, one of his brothers was running around with a knife and accidentally stabbed him in the eye. Ladislao also told him that he had a friend that didn’t have one of her arms, and another that was missing a few toes and another missing his fingers. That having missing limbs in 10 was quite common due to the labour that they had to produce and the weapons the kids had accessed.

Also, the girl—Imelda was very teasing.

She told him earlier that day when she saw him get reaped that she

thought he was very pretty and before they were to go into the arena, she at least wanted to tell him that. Harry hung out around Ladislao and Imelda, and unlike him and his district partner, Sedge, found out the two were close because they used to separate the cattle together when they were kids. That they were family friends so they would at least like one of them to go home back to their families but knew that it would be almost impossible with the amount of Career tributes this coming year. But that they were at least going to stay as allies no matter what. Harry's heart bled for them.

The more he was getting to know the tributes and their little quirks, he was finding it harder to imagine them as the cold blooded killers he knew the victors and the career tributes to be once on screen. But, he also didn't want to allow someone else to kill him without a fight so he was conflicted, but Tom—and everyone, really told him to keep going and to not allow himself to die so… Harry felt worried about the games but; he didn't have to worry yet.

Not until Friday when he would do the private session and Saturday ready themselves for Sunday, the day of the public interviews with Barty Crouch Junior and Monday morning when he would have to ready himself for the games which started at 12 o'clock.

He wondered if Tom would be able to come before he would be released into the arena, but he wasn't getting his hopes up. Not with the chance Dumbledore would hurt him. Harry wouldn't allow him to. But, with this phone, and talking to him. Maybe things wouldn't be so bad. But, really seeing him in person was much better than any phone call.

Besides Susan Bones, the other career tributes really did have a bone to pick with him. The female tribute from 1, Persephone, told him that if he wanted to at least live for a while once in the arena that he should just wait once the platform goes off there for her and she'll take care of him. And Harry was mortified at what she was offering him, and could imagine what could happen if he did take the deal. Certain death, and Harry felt like sex would be involved too — and was sure to tell her, he declined her gracious offer.

Silver, from 3, was a wreck. Like 7, he was not friends with anyone. He was clear with that — telling everyone in the room, he was friends with none of them. He trained by himself and was quite intimidating and also attractive. 7 was like that too. And Harry felt so bothered by the fact he had to meet them in the arena then in some bar or store somewhere, where they could just chat instead of trying to figure out

the best ways to kill one another. Silver ate by himself. 7, everyone knew her name but she said murderously liked to go by only 7 as if that wasn't a threat in itself, also ate by herself. Although Sequoia—the boy from her district through Harry asking, found out he was the only other person she allowed to use her name which Harry found cute.

He himself also ate by himself on occasion but he also ate alongside Sedge on the first day, Ladislao and Imelda on the second, and by himself earlier that afternoon. The Career Pack always ate together, Harry found, and it was a large group. Susan did not get along with her district partner, Valor if her sharp glares were anything to go by, but spoke pleasantly with Pearl and Laurent who were chatting up a storm with everyone. Persephone and Alistar stared at them with disinterest but changed personalities when Rex, from District 11, joined them for lunch earlier that afternoon. Conversing with him about everything under the sun. Tom found that interesting.

"Do you think 11's going to join the Career Pack?"

"Maybe, but the girl, Malia, isn't going to let her opinions stop her from telling him."

"The thirteen year-old?"

Harry hummed and began to tell him of Malia. Malia was a stubborn girl from 11. She knew how to wield a knife through her habits of making flower crowns and knife throwing (with apples they had to get down from the trees) and that District 11 didn't like the Career Pack in the games at all so if he were to join them and win, he would basically get disowned which Tom found fascinating. Harry didn't think he was going to ally himself with Malia but still felt like talking to her. Another girl who he made an effort into talking to was a girl called Hannah Abbot. She was from 8 and absolutely loved to talk.

She told him about her lover, this boy called Wayne, and how she wanted to marry him once she turned 18 but knew—she probably would never get to now that she was in the games but was given a ring before she left. It was wooden and had a ruby inside of it, and Harry felt it heartwarming. She also told him all of the drama that came with being with Wayne—and that she also had a boy best friend who wasn't so accepting of her and Wayne, but let it happen when she got reaped. She told him about her siblings and her parents; the job she wanted, and her grandmother. It was all so interesting. She also told him about her District partner, Satin.

That he was quite known in their District for being the charmer. That she personally didn't find him attractive enough to date but that he was beloved for being kind and charismatic; that the girls cried when he was reaped. That she watched the shift in the crowd when he went up the stage. Satin was an emotional tribute, Harry found. However, he was thirteen and reaped for the Hunger Games so he understood why. He even gave him a hug once they were leaving the training centre together and he broke out crying. Satin kept calling for his Ma and that he didn't think he could go through the games alone. Harry's heart burned for him.

Tom asked if he found any other tributes worthy of note but all Harry could tell Tom was that he was nervous for the interviews and that he didn't know how he wanted to be perceived. Tom said he would think about how he wanted to orchestrate Harry's meeting and that he would talk to Barty about being kinder with Harry more than anyone else. Because if anything, Barty's opinions of Harry mattered as the first impression more than anything. That Tom would tell Barty to play into the things that Harry would really have a fun time talking about and how well it would be perceived to the audience. When Harry asked if that was cheating, Tom only replied: "well, it's me, Harry. Cheating is in my blood as much as working hard is."

And he giggled, knowing that it was.

It comforted him knowing he had a friend - and that Tom, his childhood best friend, was still that. That no matter how much time had passed, nothing had changed them. He blushed, narrowing his eyes at the phone where Tom's voice was coming from. It was smooth, but also bristle. As if something had pricked one of his nerves and he was trying to not act up. The President was the obvious answer but knowing he was trying to control his attitude for him was nice.

Tom, Harry loved everything about him. He was everything good about the Capitol. From the way he did his hair, the way he presented himself, his accent — which Harry wouldn't be able to stand if it changed in any way, the way he talked, his mannerisms, his little tells. Everything. The style of clothing he wore, the facts he knew about Harry and his internal excitement (those cute tells of a raise of an eyebrow and quirk of the mouth upward) to want to know more about him, his perfectly coloured eyes of the bark trees back at home or chocolate. His pale skin to know exactly how much time that nerd has spent inside and out in the dark. His scarless fingers and hands. Everything. Harry loved everything about him. Always and now, he thinks, forever.

The Capitol was always so dull as a kid.

Even with the burning colours: neon, pastel, everything. Tom was the blizzard that tamed the never-ending showers of snow. A gust in the wind. Something that moved Harry. The tamed and brushed hair, cut to perfection. The browns, the dark reds, the greens of Mulberry or pine trees. The black of coal, the navy blue; the frightening chance to wear jeans (which Harry always did but Tom did it with him) and the greys of smoke and leftovers of cigarettes in an ashtray. A familiar companion over the years. Tom was everything of the District; plain, defiant, and full of natural beauty of personality and attractiveness Harry missed whilst being at home.

Nothing burned as much as Tom, Harry knew. His stubborn personality and spoiled heart.

However, Harry knew he didn't care regardless as long as he was Tom.

He was the good of the Capitol, what kept him sane. With the letters that Sirius sent every birthday, he was what kept his own storm from taking off. The hugs, the lack of words either of them needed to speak to one another. Just the close comfort of sleeping together, childishly, and human touch. Something they both craved and still do. If the hugs, small kisses, and sleeping together was anything to say about the matter.

And Tom grew into his attractiveness as he aged. As a kid, he was just cute. Harry knew he was the cutest kid in the orphanage and that girls, even boys were jealous of him. And felt flustered that he, Harry Potter, got to be his only and sole friend. That Tom picked him. That he could be friends with any of those kids but choose him, probably the most willing to be anything with him. Actually, that might be the reason but it's not as if he's going to worry—no. That's a lie, he will but won't make anything come out of it. It'll only be him and his thoughts. His bored and grumpy thoughts having to deal with his shit, always.

Even now, Tom still stood tall as a mountain whilst the rest of the trees stayed the same. Never changing, indifferent to the rest of the trends and the world. The President, as vindictive as he is, probably chose the best candidate as his successor — if Harry was going to be honest with himself. Although, he could tell Tom was pained from the consequences of the decision, nonetheless. That if he was going to gain all that power, he would want to do it through a means besides that simple indifference: his intelligence, looks, behaviour. Not just

the situation.

Tom ended the call abruptly, saying. “I’m going to find my way back to you, I promise.”

And all Harry could really say in that moment was, “okay.”

Sighing once the call ended, wanting to hear his voice, wanting to think about him touching his skin, he sat up and took a shower. Afterwards, he changed and left his room to go and try to find something filling to eat. The Avoxes were willing to make him something, but Harry decided that he wasn’t going to allow them to do such a thing and create a dish from home himself. Pasta was the first thing that came to mind; simple and pre-made from District 9, the Grain district. It was different but much easier to just warm up. The pasta they had at home was created from the basic ingredients Harry could find outside of District 12 (without Sirius’ knowledge) and put together alongside Abe and Sib. Sirius would kill him if he knew that fact.

Asking an Avox what sauce would go with the pasta, they handed him a packet that was in the fridge and handed it to him. He left him alone and Harry continued to make his own meal. Then, he sat and ate with cheese grated on the top of the pasta, spinning it around on his fork. Fleur, Remus, and Sedge were nowhere to be found. He found the silence nerving since back at home he was always accompanied by sound but accepted it would be like that.

He kept the fact he had a phone a secret as he went about his day in silence.

Heading back into his room after he cleaned his bowl and utensils—packing up and cleaning his mess, he laid back on his bed. Deciding to fall asleep to avoid having a headache at the long day of intense mental training and pushing of his body that he’s had to do, he woke up to the sound of what Harry knew instinctively as Tom. Opening his eyes, he grinned at the teenager that bent the mattress beside him. “How did you get here this time?”

“Do you know my amazing stylist, Francisca?” Tom asked, Harry faintly remembering the purple women who accompanied Tom on various occasions but knew her name. “Well, I texted her to pick me up and dropped me off here. Then, I had a chat with victor, Askin from District 4 who recognised me and then snuck in here.” He took one of Harry’s hands which always made him flustered and held it

against his cheek where it was bound to end up anyway. “How have you been?”

“Tired,” he said plainly. “I absolutely despise your adopted daddy.”

“And you think I don’t?” Tom snorted.

His brown eyes that reminded Harry so much of home, looked at him snuggly—into all the corners and crevices of his face. Wondering if he was judging him or so much as appreciating him as he observed him. Again, Harry felt like his face was on fire as Tom decided—himself for once, to lower his head into his chest and lay there. Tom wasn’t much for initially physical contact and Harry usually had to do anything for him to do anything back, but surprisingly he was the one for a first. He smiled, and moved his free hand so it was stationed behind his back. “How are you?—It seems from our call you’ve had a rough few days.”

“I hate Evans, I hate them all.”

Ah, Tom and his never-ending attitude streak. Never fails to entertain him.

“What about that girl, though? That Narcissa. She seems nice.”

“Personal gain is all she’s after.”

Looking down at Tom, he raised an eyebrow at him. Tom wasn’t even looking up at him, having his eyes closed and forehead pressed into his chest and Harry wondered if that was what he was really thinking—but besides against saying anything. If anything, Tom was only trying to register “why she was helping him” as an excuse for appreciation or care for him as it seemed like her character or maybe Harry was wrong and he was right. But, he still felt like he was right.

They laid in silence for a while, Harry playing with Tom’s hair and he relaxed with the weight on Tom on his body. It was comforting to say the least. Then, he asked what he wanted to do whilst he was there and Tom pulled out a full bottle of whiskey from his coat pocket. He snickered, grabbing the old drink and glancing at the notions on the bottle. “Huh, this is from the oldest part of our time?” He hummed, kissing Tom’s forehead before deciding to open the bottle.

Harry wasn’t indifferent to alcohol. He started drinking the minute he left the Capitol. Sirius actually gave him first drink and it was a tequila mixed with some other fruit mixture and it tasted lovely,

whilst listening to the Marauders play in the background—and since then, he always drank. Around friends, around family, around strangers. It was second nature to him. He even saw Remus—the sole victor of 12 drink too and he drank with him once when he was around 12 and never did it again because Sirius found out. Although, Remus didn't know anything different. He was drunk as fuck.

"So… if it's not sex you've indulged yourself in this entire time, it's alcohol?" Harry posed but Tom didn't really answer, until Harry found out he was asleep. "Huh, he still must be sick."

Sighing, Harry drank from the bottle sombrely as he decided to let the teenager sleep, turning his phone on and scrolling through social media as he tried to entertain himself. It was all about the tributes and dramas that were happening in their lives, from actors to different celebrities and performers; Harry watching various performances and movie clips as he scratched Tom's back comfortingly and carted his fingers through his hair. Tom unconsciously moved forward more so his head was curled around his collarbone and into his neck, the small inhales warming his skin. It was around nine when he saw the door crack open to reveal Fleur.

"Harry," she whispered before her eyes widened at the situation. Harry blinked, the bottle a quarter of the way gone. He was lightly drinking, knowing he wanted to drink a lot of the rest with Tom but it still was incriminating seeing him like with and how like Tom was.

He sat up, holding the back of Tom's head, pointing a finger at her. "Fleur, it's not what you think."

"You and Mr. Riddle?"

Harry sighed before kissing his forehead in apologies. "You cannot tell anyone Fleur." He gulped, "I've known Tom since I was little—and when I went back to the Districts. I didn't mean to be reaped and even back then we adored each other. For his safety, Fleur. You cannot tell anyone. I'm going to die in there, but still. No one can know." The woman bites her bottom dark purple lip, contemplating what she thought. He took a glance at the phone and alcohol before sighing. "Originally, Tom and I were just going to drink together but over the past two days he's been sick." Harry may as well play into the sickness thing too (since he kind of was.)

"And he gave me this phone because he knew, due to his position he wouldn't be able to be with me always but wanted a way to contact

me. Fleur, I'm telling you in great confidence—if I was able to escape, or run away, I wouldn't so you don't have to worry about me doing anything. I just want to enjoy the last few nights of my life alive with Tom. Can… can you accept that?"

What Harry didn't expect to happen was for her to burst out in tears.

"Oh Harry," she moved forward towards him and sat on the side of the bed, turning to him and hugging him through Tom. "I—I sort of knew and I—" she had an accent Harry couldn't place but she bursted out crying, "you and Tom. Oh, Harry." She shook her head, placing a hand onto his nearest shoulder. Harry flustered, burning. "How sad, you and him. He's such a beautiful boy, you know, and for you—someone who he trusts so dearly to be made to go into the games. It's so sad." She's ruining her makeup by crying for him and Harry can understand her, even if faintly how significant for her it is to do this. Cry for him, a tribute, then just another person in the games.

The boy he was before the games.

He tightened the hand that was around Tom's waist harder. Nerved by the situation.

It took a while to convince Fleur to leave him and Tom alone, but when he did it was as if everything relaxed in his body. Tom shifted and Harry looked down at him, knowing he wasn't going to stay asleep after that fiasco. Tom observed him, the taller teenager shifted so his arms were wrapped around his upper body. "Did she find out?"

"Yes, with liquor in my hand and a phone. Great job, Tom."

He murmured an apology through Harry's skin, Harry flushing. Lifting his chin up from Tom's head, he asked him, "do you want to play a game?"

Tom gave him a stony stare. "What kind of game?"

"Twenty-one questions."

"A drinking game?"

Harry shrugged his shoulders, wondering if it was. "I mean, we can make it one if you feel like it." Knowing Tom was still sick from whatever it was that made him sick, Harry wasn't keen on making him sicker through alcohol but if Tom chose to do so, then all Harry can say is - is that he chose to do it to himself at the end of the day.

He did tell him he shouldn't drink though, and that the game itself can be played sober.

Tom shook his head, "no. I'm sure I can drink."

"Alright then," but gave him a look of disbelief.

All the teenager did was click his tongue at him in defiance. The stubborn teenager.

Harry took a sip of the whiskey before handing it to Tom who decided to roll onto his back so he was in a better position to participate. The drink burned in his throat but Harry kissed his head to soothe the nerves. Tom drank and he coughed after drinking, the teenager glaring up at him, pouting as he handed the drink back to him that lay on Tom's side upward. "Not a very good drinker, mhm?" He laughed but Tom only watched him. "Okay, I'll bite. Who was your first kiss?"

"Mine?" Tom tilted his head, "didn't we kiss accidentally back when we were kids?"

Harry spaced out. "What, we did?"

"Yeah, in the library. I was reaching for a book you wanted and then accidentally turned too quickly, knocking us both over, and we laid disastrously on the ground." Harry could remember that, but they kissed during the fall? Perhaps, during the impact. He flushed at the implication. Tom's ears turned red and Harry felt smug. Harry said, "well, I don't exactly remember a kiss—I mean, I do remember us being real flustered after it but a kiss. Well, shit. Thank heavens."

Tom tilted his head up, confused. "What, who did you have in mind for your first kiss?"

"A girl called Nalise in preschool at 12. We both wanted to try it out."

"Sorry to wreck that moment for you, then."

Harry rolled his eyes but didn't comment on it, taking a swig of the murderous liquid. Tom followed suit, cringing as he coughed up a fit again. Harry nudged Tom, "you're turn." Tom responded instantaneously, "I don't know what to ask you." He felt his heart beat faster. "Why don't you ask me about my embarrassing moment or most drunkest. I feel like we would both have those?" Tom blinked slowly, both sick and slowly becoming drunker. Potentially on emotions. Those for Tom would rock his world.

“Okay, I’ll indulge you. What was your drunkest moment?”

“My drunkest moment was definitely my sweet sixteen birthday.” He used the arm that wasn’t holding Tom or the whiskey, and moved it as if he was gesturing to something magnificent in the distance. “Lots of school friends, the Marauders were playing in the background the sappiest songs known to man—one of which was written about me, I’ll have you know, and I was doing lots of shots. My godfather and I were a fantastic bunch to self-encourage continuous bad behaviour so, you know, I was hammered.”

“Hammered?”

“Not the terminology here?—Pissed—drunk?”

“Oh, that.” He nodded in knowledge. “I know that.”

Harry snickered, “I was singing the girliest songs known to man with my best mate, his sister, the twins, “the old bat” Perce, ‘Mione who was finally drinking with me for once, Nevs, and actually. I lot of motherfuckin’ people.” He slurred, eyes tight with the memories. Endorphins buzzed his mind as he kissed Tom’s forehead again. “That bloody bar could’ve had like twenty touchable diseases all around the room but nothing felt better than getting pissed in that place. You might’ve even decided to relax there for once, Tom.”

“Those are my standards, are they?”

“For me, maybe.”

“Maybe.” Tom said with a ridiculous smirk on his face, but his eyes screamed in terror.

Harry laughed. “You just had to be there, Tom. It was bloody brilliant and I vomited, and cried, and hugged everyone. I’m a real drunk hugger, I’m also physically attached to anyone by the hip so if you and I get drunk together, sorry man but I’m hugging you to the death.”

“Like right now?”

Cheekily, Harry snickered and looked down at him. “Maybe.”

“Maybe.”

The two laughed at their ridiculousness and they went on like that

until the entire bottle was gone. Tom's most embarrassing moment, drunk, was when his fifteenth birthday rolled around and he wanted to say, stuff it to everyone and got pissed by himself. Stealing all the liquor from the President's personal storage. He almost got alcohol poisoning and was found dangerously close to a random-ass pool five streets away. Tom flushed at the retelling and Harry lost it.

More questions rolled through like what was their favourite colour, Harry answering the obnoxious colour red—not just any red, bright red which pissed Tom off to Harry's delight whilst Tom's was his eyes. Afterwards, it got quite quiet before Harry laughed and said he liked the colour of his hair, messing it all up to Tom's bemusement.

Tom was utterly drunk by the final drip of the bottle, complaining about the fact that there wasn't anymore, and they—mainly Harry, got up to brush his teeth alongside a groaning Tom who had to use his body as support to stand. Afterwards, it wasn't long before they fell asleep together, tangled but there were a few giggle fits before either of them could shut their eyes for good.

The next morning, Harry woke up and separated himself from Tom reluctantly as the younger teenager slept in. Tom, still probably slightly drunk and gaining a heavy hangover from the expression on his face, but unfortunately for Harry, he had his training to think—unable to lie in. As a result, Harry took a cold shower and got himself ready for it. The small joys that Tom gave him could only distract him from the horrors that awaited him for so long.

Fleur took him and Sedge down the elevator and towards the training centre where he saw the other tributes come in with their escorts. He glanced around the room, watching as the trainers began to teach them various things about the situations they might encounter in the wild, certain fighting techniques that were the most effective and easiest to use, the best sort of weapons for the varying body types. Harry found himself observing the politics of the 74th Hunger Games tributes interestedly. All their dynamics sparked internal flames within Harry, knowing he also was a part of this. This stream of never-ending buzz.

Silver was becoming more paranoid by the day, always watching his back and snapping his head towards the slightest sound. The Career tributes collectively decided to torment him on this particular day, one by one appearing beside him at random times to join him at the different stations he worked at. Harry's gut churned for the boy, knowing what he must be feeling. The repeated memories of his

mother's games and how it was about to happen to him. Silver had three younger siblings and an older sister. Harry could predict their emotions and the empath that he was tensed at the thought.

Sitting down beside the District 11 girl, Malia, they began to work on net-typing together. From the position Harry was in, he was able to watch Laurent and Pearl from District 4 work together with varying weapons Harry could only imagine that they were diligent in from practice in 4. Malia, seemingly following his line of eyesight, sighed. "Those two are the worst."

He turned his head towards her, "what do you mean?"

"They're so judgemental; they already assigned us as not a threat," Malia's eyes crinkle disgustedly. She used her lips as a pointer, gesturing to Silver who was getting picked on by Alistar from District 1. "Because of his mother, they want to kill him first. From 3, they think he's a threat because he would've received the most basic of training if not from anyone, than from her. She was formidable back in her days."

This was the longest Malia ever spoke to him before, he wasn't about to interrupt her. "And Silver knows that. His district partner, Lux has already written him off as a lost cause, you know — breaking up their alliance. I think anyone would." Malia wore her textured hair in miniature braids that were held together by a hair-tie. She also wore a bandanna around her forehead that was a cream green. Grey, with golden edges. Harry wasn't blind to beauty but he wondered if the Capitol would appreciate her or if the severe and absurd beauty standards would make it harder for her to gain sponsors. Her intelligence was like a trap latched onto her tongue. Sharp, and dangerous. "I feel bad, everyone does. But I think he could do well."

"Beauty, intelligence, and strength," he relays. "He meets all the criterias."

"Except one."

"And what is that?"

"The ability to perform."

Silver cowered from fear; he let his weakness seep from him like blood in an ocean full of sharks. Ready to be feasted on, all the tributes smelt the bleeding weakness. Additionally, they all knew how to push his buttons. Repetitive ganging up. It reminded Harry of the old days

where he was known to the Seams, or back in the Orphanage, where he was weak until he had to prove that he was more—was better—was stronger than how they persevered him to be. Using all his weapons against everyone who thought better than him. Silver had none of that. Even Malia, or Valor, or 7—who held their emotions and hearts on their sleeve were better at hiding their blaring weaknesses to the rest of them. Silver had no such ability.

Malia stood up with her completed net. “Watch.”

If Harry was a better man, he would’ve stopped her. But intrigued, he let it happen. He let her sink her teeth into the victor’s son; the weakest among them. And he found it nothing but fascinating.

Silver shrieked back when Malia appeared out of nowhere and she turned to the station he was working on. Alistar, who was there alongside them, watched her intrigued like Harry — a bystander to the consequences Malia’s presence caused Silver. Unable to say anything, Malia brushed up against Silver occasionally and every-time she purposely (although, the way she did it subtly could be called an art in itself from the way it was so seemingly innocent) touched him, he flinched. Harry turned his head for a brief moment to watch everyone else and notice what their expressions were of the clear bullying.

Pearl leant up against the table of natural paints, solely focusing on their interactions, whilst Laurent snickering to Valor about what a stir she was causing before them. Susan was nowhere to be seen but Persephone, who was beside the knife-throwing station, was holding a long jagged knife giggling at the scene Malia was causing.

Ladislao and Imelda were watching the scene pitifully from their station of climbing. Ladislao was knitted his eyebrows together, with his eyes closed tight as Malia continued the emotional abuse. Imelda only shielded Ladislao by standing in front of him, but narrowed her eyes disgusted. Still, they all knew the simple fact Silver was the weakest. Not in beauty, intelligence, or strength — but in his fragile mentality. Coddled, comforted, weakened; he was reduced to this.

Harry both wanted to save him and put him out of his misery.

7 even averted her eyes from her training to stare at Silver questioningly but understanding the scenario in its very essence. She had scars all across her arms and legs, little nicks to large chunks of her body being riddled with visible evidence of a painful life. Her

fierce blue eyes tensed when observing Silver and shifted her gaze eventually when to Harry, it seemed like it became too much for her — or she couldn't care to look any further.

The rest of the weaker tributes were much the same. Eyeing Silver like he was meat being served up on a platter. Rex from Malia's district wasn't impressed by her behaviour, up on the top of the climbing station near the roof. He shook his head in disbelief before gaining the strength to keep on moving. Harry focused his attention back on Malia, and the distressed Silver.

"What—what do you guys want from me?" He hissed, Alistar and Malia both observing him idly.

Alistar licked his lips and Malia leant on her elbow, smug. "Darling," she tsked. "We're just trying to survive as much as you. It's not our fault our personalities clash with yours, is it?" Alistar gave her a bated breath, nodding impressed at her, Malia meeting his amused gaze and agreeing with his impression of her. She turned back to Silver, who was becoming greener. "What makes you think we want anything to do with you? We just… happen to be here, like everyone else."

Pearl broke out into laughter, snapping Silver's attention onto her. Busted, Harry thinks. He averts his gaze, continuing with the net folding before Silver meets his gaze. Silver, loud as any wild beast, stepped forward. "Why the fuck is everyone looking at me then, huh?" He shouts, and Harry can imagine the angst and fear that was building in his chest.

Then, Harry heard the heavy footing of Silver move in his direction alerting him he was on the prowl. He kept his expression as neutral as possible when Silver sat down on the bench Malia neglected for the one beside Harry. Meaning he was facing away from everyone and only facing Harry's direction, he queried why he came to his station in his head before deciding he must've ruled him out as the weakest and that he would not be a threat. Looking up, he saw the dazzling eyes of the victor's son evaluating his own. He quirked an eyebrow, smirking teasingly. "Silver, you realise you're bait from them, yes?"

Immediately at his words, Silver's expression and voice snaps. "What do you mean?" He asks under his breath, Harry shrugging his shoulders nonchalantly as if it didn't take much to see what was happening. Behind Silver, he noticed they were all now looking at him. And his interaction with Silver. They were questioning whether they needed to take him as a threat or not. Malia, especially, was

adamant on seeing how this was all going to play out.

“You’re not from a Career District; your mother’s a victor; you’re almost of age - strong, intelligent, and ever so beautiful. You might not be from a Career District but you’re radiating everything of a potential victor. As an outlier, the careers want to cut you from their competition and unfortunately, you have on blaring weakness. You’re unable to perform and mend to the wants of the Capitol.” Harry stretches his right arm behind his back, observing the others, uninterested in him, really. “Fear is attractive to everyone. And since it’s so sought out after, it’s easy to detect. You’re unable to diminish your feelings and as a result, all of us are able to tell what you are feeling at every given moment. If we weren’t in the games, I’d say you’d be one of the most compassionate people in our lacking world. However, we’re not.” He stands up.

He rolls his shoulders back and forth, trying to get rid of the crick they have merged between the blades, “if you really wanted to try acting more like a shark than something bleeding — then, you’ve got to shake it off. You’ve got to start believing in your own abilities to win. I like to care about people but I’ve known from a young age, taught and trained, that this mentality can sometimes win you a war rather than a battle. Good luck, 3. That’s where you’re from.”

Harry walks off.

It’s the least he could do for the verbally and psychologically damaged teenager.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Title: It's Nice To Have A Friend
Memorable Lyrics
"No curfew,
20 questions,
We tell the truth,
You been stressed out lately,
Yeah, me too,
Something gave you the nerve,
To touch my hand,
It's nice to have a friend"
-
"Call you my bluff
Call you "babe,"
Have my back, yeah, every day,

Feels like home,
Stay in bed,
The whole weekend,
It's nice to have a friend"

Alternative Chapter Title: Girls Just Wanna Have Some by Chromatics
Word Count: 7.3k

Thanks for 290+ hits and the kudos + subscriptions <3
Lmk what you think in the comments, I love reading them and responding to them
Up next... Shake It Off - Paris

P S

Shake It Off & Paris

Chapter Summary

TRIGGER WARNING! Shit, I almost forgot.

Non-con: As you will find with this fanfic Barty is an asshole. So Barty x Tom kind of happens but Tom is not into it at all but he's doing it for Harry. Just thought to paint he picture so no one is walking into this unknowingly. Although, I don't go into it too deeply. It's just the description that it kind of happen and Tom's thoughts + feelings about it.

Chapter Notes

Posted: 11th of February, 2024

Shorter chapter today, apologises but sometimes word count =/ quality = plot
If that made any sense,
Happy Reading!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tom was brainstorming different ideas of what Harry should do to perform to the game makers during his private session with them later during the day. Harry listened to Tom's demands and came back up to the penthouse during their lunch time; and using the rest of the time before the private session to plan, he was a mess. Not Harry, no, he wasn't overly worried about what he was going to be scored since he doesn't think it defines him but Tom was going mad over it. Repeating the mantra, "you've got to get a high number. A eight, nine, ten, eleven, or twelve. It's probably the best strategy to use for you since you don't want to seem weak, but not intimidating enough for their attention to be on you straight away."

Harry relaxed his chin on one of the seven pillows that he had in his Capitol bedroom. Tom stress writing, Harry studied him with a small smile, enthralled. It was another childish habit that Tom had when he was a kid that was shining during moments of high-end emotion.

"Wouldn't it be better if I presented weaker than what I really was, Tom?"

"Maybe, but sponsors. You've got the beauty, brains, and strength.

We're using it to our advantage," scribbling down more notes and ideas he concocted in that spectacularly large head of his, Tom kept murmuring game plans to himself; this analytical side of Tom reminded Harry of why he belonged here. All the educational opportunities, all the mannerisms he picked up. Him being a product of his environment was a reason why Harry liked him so much. He watched in bemusement.

Before Harry could say anything, Tom sat up straight and handed him the notebook. He pointed out the first dot point he wrote down. "You said before you were good with a knife, you should use it swiftly against some of the training dummies. Or—you said your godfather taught you how to throw heavy things, I'm not sure how well your aim is, but you could always throw a spear; or a crossbow; or sword." Harry already had a plan of how he was going to perform well in the arena. Still, he observed all the notes before looking up at what Harry could see.

A clearly frightened teenager, scared of losing him.

Harry flushed at the thought, handing it back to Tom. Tom watched in confusion. Harry grabbed his nearest hand and held it. "Don't worry about me, Tom, I think I'll be able to perform well." Moving forward, he grabbed Tom's waist, and pushed Tom back with little to-no force necessary as Tom wrapped his arms around his back.

"I'm going to be the last one to perform so I've thought of what I could do."

"Are you going to do it though?"

He was cold. Tom was always cold to the touch and in all honesty, it made Harry's heart flutter—knowing what Tom's body temperature was doing to him. However, whilst Tom's body temperature made him more concentrated and relaxed it had the opposite reaction to Tom. With his eyes dilated, shivering, slow movement, from what Harry could tell was bathing in his warm body heat did this to him. And he loved it.

"I'm going to do what I think will give me the best chance at winning."

Fleur nodded at his attire before the two tributes began to walk down with her to the waiting area. Tom was not happy to let him go but Harry told him to come up with ideas for him for the interviews to keep him busy. That allowed Harry to go without further struggle, as

Tom was really clingy to his body heat. Taking this time to examine Sedge, she was somewhat of an enigma. She never liked to talk, ever since they got onto the train together, and would only answer questions that were directly posed to her; but besides that, she would never answer any of his questions which was annoying. None of the other tributes had heard her talk or converse with another tribute so Harry was wondering what she was planning on doing on how to survive. Since she didn't have a Tom to assist her, or Fluer, or Remus really. She was alone and Harry didn't like that.

He felt like it was unfair but kept his thoughts to himself.

She should get more help if she felt it was unfair.

He was doing all he could to stay alive; Tom too—she should try and do the same.

Sedge Pines wore her dark brown hair in a messy ponytail. She was tan like Harry, had a heavy accent like Harry, and had a plenty of scars like Harry. Her brown eyes were one of the differences between the two, despite this. Harry had his glorious green eyes which a lot of people commented on. Although, his parents originating from 2 probably had a say in that. He also had curls, and completely black hair that none of the other people in the district had. Actually, when he comes to think of it — it might be a reason a lot of people in District 12 specifically were attracted to him.

The normal hair colours were dark brown like Sedges', bright ginger (although, that is mainly associated with the Weasley Family), and light blonde for the merchant kids. Harry's hair was an abnormality. He found himself thinking about Than and his dark brown hair. The teenager was unusual too, Harry found, because even though he spent so much time in the sun — he burned more than he tanned. His white skin reminds him of a descendant from a Merchant.

The Croseph Family was an unusual mix in general; Abele had light blonde hair - but tanned skin, Sibyl had the dark brown hair and tanned skin but had bright blue eyes like her two other siblings, and Than had the dark brown hair but fair skin. Both Abele's and Than's eyes were a dark brown. Additionally, they were all growing teenagers who surpassed his height ages ago. They all had traits amongst their DNA to tell the entire District that their parents were inter-district married, but they died in the mines. The three children born to the Seams.

Sirius had picked them up when they were young, Abele five, Than seven, and Sibyl two. Now, Than was seventeen, Abele fifteen, and Sibyl twelve—and she still overtook him in height. Harry thinks Than is always going to be the tallest and that the girls will stop growing whilst he still continues into twenties' but knowing the amount of food they consume on the daily, he may stop before then. The thought of his pseudo-family made his heart churn, upset, but he had to continue to pull through.

He sat beside Sedge, knowing she was from the Seam and in his class of ninety-two. In total, at their single public school - there were over two thousand students. A large majority of them were Merchant kids because the Seams kids to the Merchant parents were seen as useful enough to gain an education but as long as attendance starting from primary school was began; they were allowed to continue into high school. Sedge's mother and father were miners. Except two years ago, there was a mining accident and it killed Sedge's mother. Fortunately, Sedge's eldest and hottest brother, Leander, turned of age and began to work as well. Then, last year, Sedge's older sister, Ira, began to work - and it was technically going to Sedge's after she turned eighteen but… now she can't. Harry thought of Sedge's brother, Leander.

He was extremely hot. Back when Harry was in middle school, the transition period between primary and high school - Leander was three grades above him and wore his clothes intuitively. With thought and precision which Harry found delight in. Leander was also a regular at the Marauders' performing nights which Harry had been to ever-since he came to 12 and found the occasion night with Leander to be breathtaking.

Unfortunately, Harry never had the need to know about Sedge so she never came up. How he wished to ask about her now.

The rest of the tributes arrived and the private sessions began.

Harry knew what his aim was. To ironically get the lowest score he can. Whether that be a 4, 3, 2, 1, or even—he wasn't sure it was possible—an 0, to then use it as something he can talk about with Barty Crouch Junior. Because there were so many Career Pack tributes this year, from all three districts seamlessly able to participate; and strong outliers; Silver, 7, Imelda, Ladislao, Rex, Malia, and Sedge — he wouldn't be able to stand out.

Sirius Black, eldest son of Walburga Black, was the friendliest and

most deadly peacekeeper Harry has ever met. Being raised when he was eleven by him, alongside Than, Abele, and Sibyl—the man's methods weren't parental at all, Harry had discovered. It was as if he was being raised by a cool uncle or a concerned godfather who was relaxed by everything in life. However, if Harry was to say his exact thoughts about Sirius—it would be exactly that. Paranoia followed Sirius everywhere and he taught them that human nature was thick and thin and always interchanging. Never to trust nobody but yourself —and if that meant you yourself trusted someone, then, you trusted them. You never let someone else make that judgement for you.

There were a lot of lessons Sirius taught the four of them, but there were also the things they learnt on their own. What Sirius taught them was to unravel people—see underneath people's masks, identify and be able to label people by their toxicity, their ego, their desires; how to strengthen your own power and how to weaken their shields. How to use both your good traits and bad traits, how to balance them, and how to weaponise them. Sirius always said: "being hesitant is a sign of a layer. Pulling it back can allow yourself to make a concrete opinion about a person."

And, Harry found Sirius wasn't wrong — but that his gut feelings were usually stronger than 'just' a layer.

Seduction was another manipulative method Harry had found worked very handy when it came to him and that another entire aspect to a person could lay there. Although, Sirius never mentioned that. Harry found him to be a person who didn't let people in enough, after all the trauma he's been through to allow such a thing to happen, but that didn't mean Harry couldn't. But, it wasn't always the best way to find out what a person—who a person—why a person—how a person—amongst others, is.

Tom Riddle, his childhood best friend, was manipulative by nature. Uncontrollable, and all natural, then; Tom wasn't able to control his behaviour which the children of the Capitol found abnormal. The same way it was for Tom, it was more the same for Harry, but weirdly different at the same time. He was distant and uncontrollable, natural, all of which Tom was, but he was able to pick how he wanted to behaviour. Kind, compassionate, and warm was the route he chose back then for Tom, which softened and melted his frozen bubble but he was also able to block people out through his behaviour much like Tom was able to.

He was reckless with the way he acted because he felt compelled to,

but he also felt intuitive, aligned with his emotions. Able to perform with them. Both were able to constrict their emotions, able to fold the paper—their acts—and mould them into what they decided, able to listen and sing tunes to what their audience wanted to hear; able to be and know what someone wanted to follow through with what they wanted. However, the way they did so were two entirely different methods. Tom used his intelligence to make educated guesses. Used his brain to align himself with the manipulation.

Harry, on the other hand, used his feelings to make educated guesses. Using his emotions, his way, to align himself with the manipulation. Harry's intelligence was ingrained into his feelings, whilst Tom's feelings were ingrained into his intelligence. Both manipulative and both scarily as one another. Both had their strengths and weaknesses but together, with their match, they were complete and a force-to-be-reckoned with.

It also meant their guards could be down entirely. Harry felt no need to be flirtatious or sly to get something he wanted from Tom. He didn't need anything nor did he want anything. He only wanted Tom's company. Because he was Tom. If Harry was to flip it the other way, to how he thinks Tom thinks—there is nothing Tom is searching for, needing for, wanting for in Harry. Because he's not on-guard, he's not masking his emotions. His character. Harry doesn't think Tom knows he's even doing it but when he's around him, there isn't a scent of a lie around him.

Until Fleur barges into their room—even he feels tense then, or Remus, or just watching Tom on that podium beside the President when he first did the Tributes Parade there were lies entangled into every part of his person, it all vanished when he returned to him that night. Not that Harry was any different, but that's beside the point.

Their beyond words, Harry knows, when asked to describe the two of them.

And Harry doesn't think Tom knows about how connected they are on another level. When it comes to emotions, Tom—when it comes to a pleasant feeling—doesn't need to think why it comes. It just does. Born into the Capitol life without a need to question pleasure, he indulges it. Harry loves giving pleasure to others as much as he loves to receive it. But when he does experience it, he thinks why it comes and how it can go, and what he can do to cement the feeling into his life forever and if it's worth keeping. The pains that come with it. Because everything has a price to pay. In Tom's eyes, it's the opposite.

When he's in pain, he's wide awake—experiencing it as much as it is a lesson than it is an experience. Thinking about why it comes, how it can go, if it's necessary, and if it is, what he can do to cement it; and whether he should return the favour. To Harry, it's much the opposite again. Born with pain—just as much as Tom, but taught it differently, he relaxes when it comes. He's familiar with it. He indulges the amount knowing it could be more. The hunger, the burning, the scars; he's born Capitol but raised Districts and knows what it means. He forgets to think when something involves pain because it's familiar, some could almost be called home.

Again, why they're a good match for each other. Both can provide pain and pleasure, both know when it's too much and little. Their naturals and intuitiveness with the inner-workings of one another. Just they get it. And understand the works of how they are, even if Tom is oblivious to the thought; he still knows. Inside.

Which is why Harry does think Tom's idea could work, but that's how his method would've worked. Not Harry's. Getting the highest number does mean more sponsors, but getting a low number also gives the same result as long as it's manipulated in the correct way. Outshining the career pack is only going to put a target on his back. If he was stronger than them, which he knows he isn't—especially when outnumbered by them, maybe he would've tried to score the highest. However, scoring lower than them—lower than even the weakest tribute conceals all of his intentions entirely. Since, 'how can anyone say he is a 1, or 2, or 3, or 4, or 5 when he looks like that?' 'When he performs like that?' 'What is he actually?—is he a threat?'

The term 'a wolf in sheep's clothing' describes his method entirely.

The act of hiding amongst the superior and inferior works perfectly, especially when conflicted with outside attributes. As Tom said: "You've got the beauty, brains, and strength…" All Tom was conflicted about was the method in which he was going to perform since acting lesser than he is, isn't his forte. But he was correct in his assessment, with the beauty, brains, and strength, all of that isn't concealed but enough that a mystery is at fault. A snare waiting to trap the rabbit.

A story, innocently laid out that the Careers aren't going to think too much of it at first. Yes, he is beautiful. Yes, his interview—his interactions—he does seem to have brains, and his strength is in his age. He's almost seventeen and certainly got muscles. Harry can't exactly hide those but after working alongside lots of men and women

doing mundane things such as house chores, chopping down trees for firewood, hunting in the forest, practice stabbing another person; and sex, rough and soft, eating well due to his strengths; the links and lies are woven so that they are there. But not enough to be an immediate threat.

7 has strength, she has her own mind. Silver is weak but he does have strength, training, and the gorgeous beauty that steals the hearts of many. Rex has got strength and intelligence. The necessary survival skills to survive. Malia, even despite her age, has youthful beauty and a weapon of a tongue, intelligence streaming from her words. Imelda has strength and so does Ladislao. There are many opponents out there this year for the tributes to be watching than him. Strength is mediocre this year; the Career pack is made up of six tributes. So those outliers are even more devastating and enticing to watch. Which makes everything he has, just another layer to pull back in the games. Something ready to be utilised. Tom will understand once he gets his score.

“Harry Potter, male tribute from District 12.”

Last person in the waiting room, he stands and enters.

The walk was short and he observed everything from the minute he walked inside. Nothing was touched or changed from the first session the game makers must’ve had, and he found the information to be nothing but spectacular. It was all their strengths layed straight in one room, all for him to see. It’s better than any score could’ve got him.

He ignores the game makers and heads straight over to the weaponry area. Spears that have met their match, arrows that have met their mark, tridents that have been swung and slashed, knives that have been thrown, cut, and used disastrously. He smiled, a lot of this information must’ve come from the Career pack, all leaving their mark. Their strengths are on display but not their intelligence. He heard a voice speak up amongst the endless chatter from the bored game makers who have already watched twenty-three demonstrations of attempted power. “What are you going to perform for us, boy?” An elderly man questioned, sharp eyes narrowed down at him.

He seemed to be one of the only ones watching until more started to peer his way. Fuck.

He bit his bottom lip, wondering if he should. He found that maybe he should take a chance. “You realise leaving all of the information here

of the tribute's greatest powers aren't exactly nothing that is meaningless, yes?" He walks over to the nature area. "This is all of their strengths; all of my competition. I'd much rather see what they can do, then perform to you so you can see what I can do?—really?" He turned his head, and rose his eyebrow at them as if they were beneath him.

"What can you do, 12?" Another game maker spoke up.

"Depends on what is necessary. These people have weaknesses, finding out who they belong to are my strengths. Now, if you could please give me a low score for not demonstrating anything to you the normal way — and leave me be, that would be fantastic." Again, it's all about the method. If Harry were to act timid and say he was observing his competitors like a measly, nerdy school-boy—the reaction from the game makers wouldn't nearly be as significant as it was.

He's recreating his identity to the game makers by his fluid actions; he notices.

Building a new impression of him. A new identity to assign him as.

Whatever comes out from the session today, he can work with as he has his other half: Tom.

Although, he really wants this to work.

He observes everything before his time is up. Walks to each and every section that was touched, made mental calculations to the sections that weren't. The brain-demonstration sections especially. He made notes, ones he was content with telling Tom later, and then turned to the game makers. "The Capitol loves horrors. Imagine what happens when they finally meet me."

And Tom went unspoken.

He turned and began to walk out of there.

Heading back up to his room, he was pounced on by Tom, Remus, and Fleur. Sedge was nowhere to be found. "How did you think you went?" Was the first question that Tom asked, hand on his forearm. He began to direct Tom only back to their room. "I'll either get a 12 or a 0, but either I can work with." The teenager's face almost rejects the response as he registers what he had said. Tom rose an eyebrow, moving so he was sitting on the bed rather than standing up. Harry

followed, sitting beside him. “I’m hoping to play the wolf in sheep’s clothing.”

“By pretending you're weaker than you really are?”

“Yes, and it’ll either be taken as a weakness or a strength by how I demonstrated it.”

“And either way—“

Tom’s brain worked miraculously fast.

“So either way, you can pretend to be the weakest of the pack or the strongest. But either way, a mystery to the entire 74th hunger games. How did he become the weakest, or how did he become the strongest?” Tom almost looked love-stuck with the way he reacted to his comment. “How did you do it?”

“After a minute, one of the game makers asked me, “what am I going to do” as I had done nothing of their interest previously and I answered them by explaining that what the tribute’s strengths were were my weaknesses so rather than demonstrating my own, which would just be relaying to the tributes anyway which were my strengths, I would rather pray and examine their own. As they were before me, untouched, and clear as day to how I could counter them. I told them that seeing how they perform is exactly my area.”

“Really? I would’ve rather performed.” Tom answered cheekily. “But yes, that was very clever.”

“Please, Tom.” Harry sighed, fondly, taking his hand and placing it on his cheek—rather gently, “you would rather submit yourself as the best. I’d rather submit myself as the worst. We gain our wants regardless but how we do so is just as cunning as the other. Although, I must admit that they could rate me high like you said they would due to my foolish confidence but either way; we can work around it.” What Tom didn’t realise, despite cheeks warming, was that Harry was rather infatuated with him.

He knew, he always had known Tom was attractive. Tom has instinctively always known that he was also attractive, but sitting here —almost like putty in Harry’s hands did he realise that Tom didn’t think Harry found him attractive. He paused, almost freezing as he came to the conclusion. He thought he was doing this because Harry was like this. Referring back to when they were kids.

Harry blinked, confused before smiling affectionately. Eyes crinkling with softness.

Tom thought that Harry's love was his touch. Thought his own love as his words; which may be true but everyone is able to touch and speak to each other like lovers. No, Harry knew. It again, was much the opposite. Harry's love was his words; touch was something that came with the package. Tom's was his touch, surprisingly enough. Everyone's love language was the thing they were most reluctant to give to someone besides their significant other. Harry felt like speaking the truth about matters was leaving him the most vulnerable whilst touch was something he could control, whilst Tom thought allowing and giving affection was his greatest weakness, but words was his most controlled aspect. It's why Harry flushed.

He watched the two of them with keen eyes. Tom's cheeks were flushed against his hand, pupils were blown wide and Harry can imagine that his own were much the same. He adored Tom, could even say he loved him—was in love with him, and…

Harry's eyes began to become red, hot.

This wasn't the right time for any of this.

Harry was about to enter the hunger games, not knowing for certain if he was going to be alive by the end of it. And he knows Tom's feelings replicate his own, from the way he's looking at him, soft and malleable under his touch. Willing. Tom bit his bottom lip, observing him, studying him with the same eyes he knows is going to take Harry's reaction 'just as another thing, another quirk' that was about him. As much as speaking was Harry's one true love demonstration, reducing it was something of an enigma. Words that weren't spoken when they were meant to. He took what Tom gave him, his touch; his willingness, and curled himself around it. He began to speak, brave enough with the trust Tom had shown him. "I wish I could stay with you forever."

"You—" Tom's eyes were blasted open, "you're *not* going to die, Harry—I won't—"

"I don't mean that Tom." He shakes his head.

He takes his hand into his own. "I mean, if I do survive and become a victor. I won't be able to see you. I will be in District 12, only returning for a piece of the year to you where I'll have to train scrawny-looking kids who know nothing better about life than dying. I

won't be the same ever again once I go into the games. These games," he averted his eyes, before shutting them completely. "They are never going to stop once I leave the arena. It will be forever."

Tom's hands gently depart from his own and feel the cool touch of them make their way to his cheeks. He opens his eyes to find Tom cupping his cheeks, looking so delicately as everything precious, and hopeful. Determined. "I won't be forever. Not with us. Not with me. Nor you."

"We're different, Harry. You'll be a victor, and with me, President. We'll be able to do anything."

"But—"

"No buts, alright?" He pushed his forehead forward and leant it up against his. "*We'll* be okay."

The two of them relax in the presence, in the moment before the hour passes and the scores have been evaluated for them to make their way outside, where Sedge is nowhere, and onto the couch. Tom was hesitant before Fleur told the two of them, "she's outside on the roof. Sedge usually spends her time watching the Capitol. I wouldn't say she'd come down to see you or this." She swung her hand to the television. "It's beneath her, unfortunately." Harry curled into Tom's side, cheek on his shoulder as Fleur took her seat whilst Remus sat between her and Tom. Also, joining them was Morgan and Bonavich. Francisca, as a friendly addition.

The three Capitol stylists arrived before the television program began to say hello and to wish the two the best of luck, but Sedge was 'nowhere to be found' and Harry was 'visibly not interested and very interested in the President's successor' so it was limited to a simple welcoming, Harry could see Tom was pleased with. Then, Barty Crouch Junior went on the screen.

"Ladies, gentlemen, everyone in-between; tonight's a special night because the tributes for the 74th Annual Hunger Games scoring has been released." He grabbed himself a bottle of champagne, "crack open a bottle of wine people because tonight is something unforgettable in this year's line-up of tributes."

"Let's begin from the top!" Harry snickered against Tom's neck, who was red. "District 1, Persephone Ryde. She received a… 9!"

Tom whispered to Harry, "I bet that this Alistar will receive a 10."

“Mhm, I’m not taking that bet,” he whispers back.

“The male tribute from District 1, Alistar Fenlon received a… 10!”

Susan Bones from District 2 received a 10 as well, and so did Valor. Lux received a 7 and Silver received an 11. Harry gasped when the score rang out through the screen, Tom additionally flabbergasted beside him. “How did he get that?” Francisca asked, and Tom grumbled to both himself and Harry, “Narcissa isn’t going to stop bragging about that for months now.” Harry barked out a laugh as his response, understanding a bit more about Narcissa now; that girl who helped Tom with the whole bathroom situation.

Both tributes from 4 received a 10. The girl from 5, Romilda Vane, only received a 6. The boy on the other hand got a 5. The girl from 6 received a 4, and the boy from 6 received a 3. It was unimpressive but as they got up further to the outliers, it got more interesting. 7 received an 11 which made Harry and Tom laugh again, as if that wasn’t entirely frightening but it wasn’t already known to them that she was going to make a fierce opponent. Sequoia only received an ironic 7, on the other hand. Hannah, the girl from 8, received a 6 whilst the boy, Satin, received an 7. The girl from 9 received a 2 whilst the boy received a 4. Imelda received a 9 which Harry found impressive until Harry found out a moment later Ladislao also received a 9.

Malia received an 8 which wasn’t bad at all but Rex received a 10 which was amazing, all things considered, but he was eighteen and built massively. Still, thirteen and an 8—that wasn’t bad odds. Then, it came for Sedges’. She received a 9 which was something to coo at; but Tom and Harry weren’t focused on that much at all. “Okay, I bet I’ll receive a 0.”

“I think you're better than a 0 and that they will appreciate your intelligence. I’m betting on 12.”

“What are you guys talking about?” Francisca, Tom’s saviour, speaks up.

“We’re betting on what score I’ll get!” Harry answers and all three stylists blink in horror.

“You think you’ll get a 0?” Bonavich questions, “why?”

But there was no time to answer as Barty began to speak his name. Tom held Harry’s hand. “And lastly, the male tribute from District 12.

Harry Potter. He received…” Barty held up the card his score was on, blinked silently, to which Harry and Tom were both shaking and pushing each other in excitement, and turned to the people off-camera. “Is this score *real*?”

A stern voice spoke up. “Yes, Barty. It’s real.”

“Oh shit,” Barty snickered in surprise. “And Harry Potter with a score of *nothing*.”

Harry wasn’t exaggerating when he said he literally screamed.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Title: Shake It Off
Memorable Lyrics
"It's like I've got this music in my mind
Sayin', 'It's gonna be alright'
'Cause the players gonna play, play, play, play, play
And the haters gonna hate, hate, hate, hate, hate
Baby, I'm just gonna shake, shake, shake, shake, shake,
Shake it off, I shake it off"
-
"I never miss a beat,
I'm lightning on my feet"

Alternative Chapter Title: Sleeping with the enemy by TV Girl
Word Count: 5.2k

OMG thank you for almost double the hits we had last chapter!!
530+ hits wow
<33 to the kudos and subscriptions, I'm glad you want to hear more of the story
Lmk what you think in the comments like always, I'm very happy to hear them & your thoughts
Happy Sunday, or what my sister says "Happy Sunday Reset!"
Up next... Look What You Made Me Do
P S

Look What You Made Me Do & Fearless

Chapter Summary

Hold on, the last chapter's warning was supposed to be for this one...
Like you know, non-con between Barty and Tom for a snippet of this chapter.
I thought it was last chapter for some reason, read the warnings there.

Chapter Notes

Posted: 14th of February, 2024

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The eve of the games was reserved for private interview training. Harry had a sort of idea of how he would perform. He would discuss his main topics that extended upon his three main traits; dating life back at home — beauty; what school was like and how he thought of the Capitol — intelligence; his main skills despite his low score of nothing — strengths. And how he would put his survival skills to the test, explain what it really means being the last tribute to go into the private session and what an advantage it gives him. However, say nothing about what he learnt. Show them the sugar, but only show. Don't let them taste, don't let them want; let them need.

However, Tom was understandably nervous but what Harry found crazy was that he was more nervous than him. It was shown through the small touches he initiated that drove him mad. The small grab for his hand, the small touches of the wrist, the silent nudges of shoulders, the biting of his lip — which was going to be ripped off at the rate he was going at, and the small movements that were going to spark more but the sudden stops that actually made Harry want to rip out his eyeballs. It was driving him insane. As a result, Harry took his slightly shaking hands, wrapped his arms around him, kept a close distance and wanted Tom to notice that this wasn't a normal friendship… since Harry was both extremely talkative unlike how he usually was unless he liked someone, and that Tom was overly cuddly. But, Tom being Tom didn't fucking pick up on it.

So as Tom kept speaking about things the audience would like about him, Harry kept fucking wondering when he would start to notice

them being really close. That Tom wouldn't normally do this; not from the media he's been scrolling on from his phone, and that he was being extremely fucking vulnerable and didn't want him to die. Actually, he should be thinking about that more.

He either wins the games or dies.

Against twenty-three other tributes.

He gulps before leaning his head to Tom's and kisses his perfect cheekbone. Tom froze and shivered at the touch but didn't break contact; Harry knowing it wouldn't change a thing. But he wasn't about to say anything. He was about to go in the arena tomorrow morning, he was about to spend who knows how much time in the arena facing terrifying and traumatic things, Harry was not going to break this perfect fantasy until after the 74th Hunger Games if he survives at all. It was the least he could do. He flushed when Tom leant his forehead to his neck and nape, relaxing there. The two of them were almost like being in the best place in the world. And it's not like this is something Harry says about any of his love interests. They're all… interesting, but Tom. Truly one of a kind. His match.

Francisca—because of Tom's insistence came to his dressing in his bedroom, Morgan and Rhodes fitting him in his outfit. Tom was sitting with one leg crossed over the other and Francisca was sitting beside him. The two Capitol elites were staring and judging him as if he was meat. Rhodes began to do his makeup as Morgan wet and curled his hair further. Tom's eyes were heavily glued on his person before he stood up instantaneously.

Harry rose an eye at his expression, not expecting to see it change so drastically. It went from memorised to dark in a second but it didn't look as if he was thinking about him anymore. Francisca eyed Tom like Harry did but Morgan told him to snap out of it and change whatever expression he himself was holding. Tom turned to Harry but he wasn't looking at him. "Dating life, school, Capitol thoughts, main skills, and why you scored nothing?—yes," he hissed.

"That is the plan," Harry admitted. "Why? Tom—"

Tom turned on his heel and left before he could pester information out of him further.

Morgan told him to relax his shoulders and he did, but was still annoyed by the abrupt change. Not having Tom made things feel ten times more boring than they actually were, he sulked and Francisca

grabbed him some ice tea; saying it would refresh him. Apparently it was grape flavoured as Morgan put more moose into his hair and curled his wet curls more.

This sucked.

He was wondering what Tom had to do that was so much more important than hanging out around him but decided if Tom decided it was more important, it possibly was. Tom usually had a sensible and clever knack at picking and choosing situations that were more worth his time.

———

Tom put his hands into his pants' pockets and lowered his head slightly entering the backstage entrance of the Hunger Games Interviews' building. The guards said nothing to him, not needing to as he had access to go anywhere he wanted as the President's successor and headed through to where he knew where Barty would be getting settled and prepped. People were lining up and being taken to their seats already as they awaited the big interviews of the night that would make or break tributes. He found himself drenched by the rain, wetting the floor as he walked to Barty's dressing room. He didn't knock and Barty glanced at him in the mirror. "Tom?"

His stylists, Terrance, Bryon, and Regis all looked startled by his appearance. So was Barty but he muted his comments to judge him with his eyes only. He moved and stood, leaning against the ceramic dressing table, and bore his eyes at him from where the stylists weren't standing in front of him. The teenager battered his eyes at him, confused. Noted by his lack of words, he began with his questions. "Do we need privacy or…?"

His eyes went back and forth between his stylists and Tom.

"I will, in a moment, but you seem to be in the middle of something."

"Alright," Barty flicks his wrist, "back to work, people."

Without another word, Terrance, Bryon, and Regis all continue with what they were previously doing. Tom sat there, not making eye contact as he thought about how he was going to approach the topic. Barty was going to be on-stage with all twenty-four tributes later that night. Harry was going to be the last tribute; and unless he gives the audience a fantastic show, Tom wasn't sure how confident he was going to be letting him do this alone. Barty was a hard nut to crack.

He liked to give all the tributes the best chances possible but when he didn't connect to a tribute, everyone noticed. Especially when he pre-disliked a tribute or had a grudge. Harry needed all the help he could get so if Barty was especially keen and interested in him, it would work in his favour despite being at the bottom of the rankings.

It took an hour until Barty was near completion but he didn't need to be on stage for another hour, the early hour only five o'clock. Six was show time. Seven was when District 1 arrived. Eight was District 6. And nine o'clock in the evening was lastly, District 12. Then, the gossip session where if things worked - Harry would be the talk of the town. But he needed Barty's co-operation.

Terrance was the last to leave, eyeing the two before shutting the door behind himself. Barty sat on the stylist chair and observed Tom from where he leant against the table. He began to smirk, face cold and devious, as he rose an ugly eyebrow. "What did you need my personal assistance for, Mr. Riddle?"

"I need you to do a favour for me."

"Now, now; I know very well I don't owe you, nor anyone any favours so what is in it for me?"

Tom bit his inner-cheek, concluding it was the best choice of routes.

He turned to Barty suddenly which erased all previous confidence Barty had, confused by the sudden action. "I need Harry Potter to have the best chance at winning the 74th Annual Hunger Games; what I need you to do is make sure that everything about him - his intelligence, beauty, and strengths are emphasised. I also need you to be able to connect with him on a deeper level than any of the other tributes that you previously had spoken to."

Barty stood up before crossing his arms, sliding ever-so closer to Tom with his eyes narrowing with precision. "So you want me to cheat and help this, bet of yours, win?"

The older teenager slid so close, he was beside - touching Tom and leaning up against the table, eyes turned away from Tom but his mouth warming his ear as Tom closed in his eyes in anxious intimidation. Money was never an option with Barty; he was practically swimming in it like Tom was. No, something Barty would never get on a regular basis was him. That was what Tom was putting up as an exchange. Something even he couldn't resist at.

Barty's eyes lingered on him with harsh burning thoughts. "Now, Tom; this," he touches both his shoulders without resistance, "if something I'm willing to trade for that little miner's boy of yours." Then, the warm and wet sensation of kissing and licking was attached to his throat like a leach and Tom was swung by the waist to turn around and meet Barty directly.

The older teenager pressed an hand behind Tom's head, cupping him as he began to kiss him. Tom knows the word is make-out but he finds it to be the least pleasant. Then, the moving began and Tom was pushed back until he was lifted onto the table where Barty picked him up and placed him on the table. This is for Harry. Him.

He felt his eye-ducts swelling with nausea. He hated this. He was disgusted by Barty. His stomach clenched and Barty was pressed up against him further. Tom sniffled and thought there would be no other exchange than this that Barty would accept. And Tom couldn't think of any other way that he could convince Barty otherwise. Killing him was an option, maybe after this he would do it so no one besides him knew of what he did, but that would be too obvious. Barty was beloved almost as much as Tom. People would notice. He had to be patient. Wait until presidency. He began to cry against Barty's hot mouth when his hands began to venture downward.

He didn't like this. Not at all.

This was nothing like Harry; this was nothing he was in-control of.

Tom felt as if he was suffocating.

He was left disarrayed. Both naked, with their positions changed where Barty was leant up against the table with his legs wrapped around him, Tom kept charging though. Barty wanted him to call him something but he could hardly speak. Tom thought if he did, he would vomit right there and then, but he kept going. Harry, he thought. This was Harry. Harry, his Harry, his Harry.

Tom leant forward, moving and angling his body deeper into Barty, he whimpered against his shoulder. The tears redden his eyes and cheeks, and his lip was bit so much that it kept bleeding against Barty's shed chest, and his ears felt like they were going to explode - Barty's groans and moans disgusting - and his hips had never undergone such endurance before he felt like he wouldn't be able to successfully move after. Barty latched his teeth onto his neck, shoulder, chest and bit anywhere that he could. He wanted to make his mark, Tom

discovered.

The teenager finished his load into Barty with a shutter and a groan, thinking of only his sole companion, not this whore that was underneath him - and kept going knowing what this deal composed of. Harry's success. At least if he were to make Barty cum, he wouldn't have to ever do this again. Once the pathematic man spilled his load onto Tom's stomach with a loud-pitch scream, he rested his head against his stomach. Immediately, Tom said. "You now owe me that favour," he glared to which Barty laughed at, eyes fond.

"Alright, lover-boy. I'll admit, you were good." He sighed, "and owe you a favour. Okay."

Tom snatched the cigarettes that were on the table, grabbed one of Barty's thirteen lighters; the pink one, and lit a cigarette between his lips. Barty whistled, turning back around to the mirror and observing his makeup to make sure nothing had changed. He snickered about something in the mirror as Tom grabbed a tissue, cleaning himself with it. "I reckon I'll go on stage like this."

"Fuck out of your mind?" Tom, suspiciously, rose his eyebrow at. "Why?"

"Oh please, Tom." Barty shook his head dismissively. "Sex is all the look, nowadays. Especially one as good as," his eyes did all the talking as they looked him up and down appreciatively. Tom rolled his eyes, grabbing his underwear and pulling it over himself. He used his index and middle finger to hold the cigarette as he blew out all the smoke. He took another drag before pulling his shirt over his sticky body. He wouldn't have time to shower before the interviews, he outwardly cursed himself that he went along with this.

Then, he put his pants on and suite, but looking at himself in the mirror he looked completely dishevelled and also like he just had gotten fucked. He flushed at himself, wondering what Harry would say if he knew, the teenager grabbing the entire pack of cigarettes and the pink lighter; Barty shouting at him as he pulled on his shoes to give them back before he left. He kept smoking and pulled out his phone to text Francisca to pick him up. Outside, it was freezing. The clouds were entirely clouded over and everything was making Tom shiver.

The rain drenched him more and he sat on the stairs of a building nearby to the Interview's Building as he smoked, wondering how the

fuck things turned out like this. All for Harry, he thought to himself. It had to be all for him. His childhood best friend.

The rain masked his emotions as his eyelashes dampened.

When Francisca arrived she got out of her car startled. “Are you alright, Tom?—You look a mess.”

And he feels it too.

Standing up, taking another drag of the cigarettes Barty had, he ignored her walking to the car. “Everything has been taken care of, can you take me back to the entrance where I’ll enter from.” Francisca looks him up and down, narrowing her eyes—just like him, and Tom shivered. “I plan on changing into one of the other suits you have in the car.” Without another word, he slid into the back seat of the car, unusual to what he would usually do. She, again, took that as a sign something was wrong but didn’t speak about it as she got into the car.

They drove off and Tom lowered the window so the rain would be able to touch his heated and sticky face. He sniffled and he wondered if he started crying again before he got out, and changed around the back a few kilometres from the entrance so he would be hidden from the world. The outfit was a dark silk purple with silver accents whilst Harry’s was a dark grey silver that had purple accents. A choice Morgan wanted to implement, the colour provided by Francisca. The teenager combed his hair back and was touched up with waterproof makeup Francisca lathered on him, especially underneath and surrounding the eyes.

The whispers and comforting words of, “everything is going to be perfect, don’t worry, sweetheart,” she kissed his hair. “You look dashing like always. Nothing out of place.”

Francisca, herself, was dressed up in the same shade of purple to Tom. Her eyelids shimmered silver and her lips were a plum. Everything was stunning about Francisca so it was no surprise that when the two of them walked into the room all eyes turned onto them. Francisca whispered into Tom’s ear - which made Tom shiver at the move - “you find your friends, I’ll find mine.”

And she left him there.

And everyone looked as if he was something to eat as he began to manoeuvre himself towards where his friends were sitting, at the perfect position in the room where they got the best seats outlooking

that stage. He shivered at the contact the girls displayed when they first saw him. “Stunning as always, Tom.” Narcissa complimented, whilst Bella battered her eyes at him. “Everyone is loving you tonight.”

Everything—everyone—it—it was all too much.

Tom had his cigarettes taken away from him, using alcohol as his next stress relief. Narcissa due to Tom’s persistence kept supplying his hand with the top whiskey, vodka, and other obnoxious concoctions as he stared ahead engaging in no conversations whatsoever. Barty’s eyes were on him, lingering - disgustingly, as he stared straight back with burning hatred behind his eyes. Barty’s head was dead unless he made Harry look spectacular tonight.

And Tom was also annoyed because all the comments Barty was getting from his friends, and other seated members of the Capitol were degrading to him. Like teeth on a chalkboard. Evans was nowhere to be seen, recovering, but Nott sat by his left as Narcissa sat to his right. Bella beside Lestrange, and Lucius to Narcissa’s right. The group couldn’t stop talking about him. Nott narrowed his eyes at Barty. “Did he decide to get fucked again, the promiscuous bastard.”

Tom felt his cheeks burning with sheer disgust and embarrassment. Bella purred, “well Barty surprisingly doesn’t look like shit tonight. Whoever fucked him must’ve been good for him to look like that.” She pushed a black curl back behind her ear with curiosity.

Lucius murmured to Narcissa, “my dear, I’ll fuck you that good tonight.”

“Oh Luce,” she snorted - putting a hand onto his shoulder.

Lestrange eyed him. “I bet whoever fucked Bart was over fifty.”

Bella turned to him. “I reckon forty.”

“Just because he has serious fatherly issues doesn’t mean every person he’s going to get fucked by is over their twenties.” Nott tells the two beside him. Tom found himself burying his thoughts deeper in a black hole by the minute. Distanced and mortified. Lestrange holds up his glass of whiskey, pointing towards Barty who was interviewing the second tribute of the night, Alistar. “That, my dear, is a man with experience. Barty wouldn’t not be fucked like that if not with a man with spectacular tastes in sex.”

Tom blinked, then again.

He had to remember how to breathe.

Experienced, Lestrange had called him. Old.

Tom is both a virgin - or well, not anymore, but is certainly younger than Barty.

He kept his mouth shut. Palms sweaty, cheeks aching, mouth craving more alcohol, stomach rumbling, eyes dry, ears blank, skin shaky, inner-cheeks destroyed, nose stuffy, makeup itchy; everything feeling wrong Tom bore his eyes at the stage. District 1 was like how they usually were. Charming, chipper, bothersome. District 2 was nothing different. Distant, vipers, and dangerous. District 3 Narcissa cooed over. Intelligence, weak, Silver. District 4 was all themselves. Ditzy, loving, and adoring: sickly. Tom wanted to gouge out his eyes. District 5 had a sick romance and was nothing unusual for an outlier district. District 6 had nothing spectacular. District 7 had 7 so Barty didn't have to do anything to discourage the audience. District 8 was nothing of note. District 9 again had young tributes so most of it was pitiful. District 10 had Imelda and Ladislao dressed fancily, in warm, friendly outfits. District 11 had Malia and Rex but they were distant and themselves. Barty did his role by the time Sedge had her interview.

There was no spark erupting from any of their discussions.

Tom's stomach felt as if it was about to eat itself.

Barty was doing the bare minimum with all of them. The girl from 1 wanted Barty to come closer to her; he didn't. The boy from 2 wanted Barty to squeeze his muscles; he didn't. The boy from 4 wanted to show off his grip, breaking a glass on stage; he didn't say anything besides fake cheer. Everyone wasn't getting the enthusiasm they wanted to radiate from the man. Tom knew he had power. His words, his actions, and now; his sex - but he didn't see it come into fruition until now.

When it got to Harry, he elegantly walked onto the stage like he owned the place. With confidence that fed the greedy and spoilt eyes of the Capitol. Harry's hair was dark, wet, and extremely curled. As if water droplets were about to fall from his hair. His shirt has its top button open, showing off his collarbone as if he was about to seduce a vampire, and his eyes. The emerald memorised the Capitol. Being one of the rarest eye colours in the world, green was rare. Especially Harry's which was this emerald shade of green. The brightest and a

highly dangerous ore amongst the Hardness Scale.

Narcissa gaped, whispering. “He’s beautiful.”

Tom nodded, knowing that exact feeling; unfortunately for everyone here, Harry was his.

Barty began to talk to Harry more lively, as if noticing the energy that was radiating from him. Something that could be emphasised with a willing person. The Capitol was enthused by Harry - and was addicted. Bella drank her drink faster, Lestrange tilted his head as if to see Harry undressed, Nott’s pupils dilated, Lucius snickered amongst Narcissa, and Tom -

He was already enthralled with the being called Harry Potter.

———

Harry stood nervously in the line behind all the other tributes. Fiddling with his collar and cuffs, he found ways to keep himself still whilst also entertaining himself. This was nerve-racking because he knew how Barty Crouch Junior could be. He was a two-sided person who if not found in the mood, wouldn’t entertain the audience with the tribute the way they would’ve liked. And from the sound of it—

Persephone walked angrily once she was behind the curtains from the audience. Her eyes were wild like an animal’s and she clenched her fingers on her dress to keep her from tripping over it. She unfortunately had to run into him because she wasn’t paying attention to where she was going. Harry, anticipating pain, skidded to the floor, and she landed on top of him, slipping. “Ah, fuck.” She hissed. Harry bit his lip, reducing any noise that he would’ve made as he held the wall, trying to sit up. Sedge looked down at the two of them and the rest of the tributes would’ve turned their way to see what the thud was.

“Are you alright?” He asked her, using one of his arms to help steady her.

“Trying to get in my bed, Potter?” She glared angrily, but her tone sounded jokingly.

He shook his head. “No, I just wanted to make sure you were alright.”

Persephone’s hair came undone from the hairstyle the stylists had put it in. She held her hair before rolling her eyes that were coated in lots

of eye makeup. “I fucking hate that man,” she glared towards the stage where Alistar was heading up. “He doesn’t even try. I bet he was so distracted with who he got fucked by that’s all he’ll be thinking of tonight.” Harry glanced up at the screen, raising an eyebrow to Barty who was beginning to talk to Alistar, Persephone following his gaze. Although, Harry didn’t notice it before, it did look as if Barty was fucked beforehand.

Harry was a switch so he’s had his number of fun being the fucked, and doing the fucking so he’ll admit that yes, he did look as if he was fucked. Well. From the way his grin curved around his cheeks and how his eyes were blown wide open. Harry nodded, Persephone watching him. “He does look as if he was fucked. What do you reckon from a scale from one to ten?”

“A definite ten.” Persephone rolled her eyes. “Wouldn’t stop looking into the crowd.”

“A Capitol then.”

“For sure,” she snickers. “I wouldn’t ever let him near my bed.”

Harry smiled alongside Persephone before she turned around. “Good luck, Harry. He isn’t in the most forgiving mood tonight.” Unable to say anything before she walked away, he took a deep breath and thought about what he would talk to Barty about. His dating life. He would say that he was inter-mingling with a lot of people and that he was beloved amongst the community; but his main lover would be distraught about him leaving home to go into the arena. Harry decided not to talk about anyone in particular but knew that if anyone, he was talking about Tom, and he hoped that Tom noticed. Secondly, he would then discuss how school was and how he was in the top of his classes, especially poetry where he would dazzle Barty; and then talk about what he thought of the Capitol. Impress the Capitol with his knowledge of the said Place of Dreams and what he found most memorable. Then, what some of his skills are; and why he got nothing in the private session. Spread breadcrumbs and hope they’re not appetising enough to reach for immediately. Only when starved for information.

Even since he was a kid, he was able to distinguish when a person was conveniently attractive and when they were unconventionally attractive. Both Persephone and Alistar were conveniently attractive people, and their outfits and mannerisms flaunted it further.

Valor wasn't someone who Harry would say was conveniently attractive but his features aligned with the outfit that he was wearing and really made Harry think otherwise. Susan was much the same, but she wasn't Harry's type in general. Silver was the Capitol's heartthrob. He was wearing an outfit entirely silver and wore his blond hair messily as if it was his bed hair. Harry thought Silver was gorgeous but he was as weak as any other Capitol member when asked to hold a knife. The weakest link out of them all. Pretty, but deadly.

Lux was dressed up in all black. She looked fierce.

The District 4 tributes were dashing as always. Pearl's was magnificent, dressed in her name; pearls. Laurent wore a deep blue of what Harry could picture as the ocean. His eyes popped with the colour and everything about the two tributes spoke of luxury. Harry found himself annoyed by his ability to be easily aroused. All of them were spectacular eye-candy. The girl from 5 flaunted her breasts and she got a few whistles. The children from 6 were cute and adorable. And from District 7…

7 was hot. She wore a deep blood red dress. Her breasts were flaunted like most of the female tributes' but she appeared murderous. Everything from her displayed muscles to the red lipstick, to the makeup, to the hair. Everything made her absolutely stunning. Harry would bet on her if he was a Capitol citizen due to not even her looks, but from her damaging aura. Her eyes, they were blue; a gorgeous blue and her black hair whisked around her cheeks and neck almost like a snake. If the crowd wasn't enthralled with her, Harry would be shocked.

Sequoia was underwhelming as he came after her; but he was still gorgeously groomed in his own way. Hair cut and suit fitted; he looked more like a man than the boy that was welcomed at the train station by the Capitol citizens.

The 8 tributes were all magnificent. The girl, Hannah, had a golden dress that sung to the audience. An old fashion piece as the crowd swooned at it. Her smile and her laughter spoke to them all. Satin was much the same, wearing a similar suit piece that was baby blue; with shimmering blue accents. Everyone was falling in-love with the tributes as they spoke their truth. Harry, as much as he hated the Hunger Games - the prospect, was falling in-love with them too. Their meanings as people. Not just tributes in a game.

Persephone with her love for chocolate. Alistar with his love for

sunsets. Valor with his love of his friends back home at 2. Susan with her passion to one day become a peacekeeper and serve the country. Silver with his bleeding love for his family; his mother. Lux with her love of building machines. Pearl with her love for the breezy beach air, the salts, and helping out her siblings. Laurent with his love of baking for the community. Romilda with her love for her partner. Royce with his love for playing board games with his schoolmates. The District 6's girl's love for running after the trains as a kid. The District 6 boy's love for the butterflies in the paddocks. 7 with her adoring passion for chopping down trees to help out her father; the most information Harry's ever received from her. Sequoia with his love of the cold river in the summer-time. Hannah's love for the efforts her teachers put into teaching her 'even if it didn't mean anything.' Satin's adoration for his dog, Franklin, his best friend. Harry teared up at that. The District 9 girl's love for her younger sister, Abby. The District 9 boy's love for the game tag he played regularly with his best mates, Priya and Ciel. Imelda's hope for the new schooling to be put-in place for the primary school children; and adoration for all the good things her sisters, Madeleine and Kiane, were going to do in the future with their husbands. Ladislao's blessings for his family, his mother specifically. Malia's tears, emotional words for her older brother, Jalen. Rex's promises for his younger siblings, Khalil, Leon, and Bisa. Sedges' love for siblings, and the memory of her parents.

"And how for the last and final tribute of the 74th Annual Hunger Games!—Harry Potter."

Sedge walked past him with murder on her mind as he made his way onto the stage.

His mind went a hundred kilometres per hour; smile, confidence attracts, wave, crinkle the eyes, shake hands, always smile, laugh, be yourself. Barty sat across from him with the dishevelled look of the night. Harry would really like to ask, but better to not. The celebrity quirked his eyebrow curiosity speaking to him and the audience as he leant back, whisked his hand up in the air meaninglessly and tilted his head; "so, Harry Potter. I'd love to say, you look fantastic tonight."

Barty's eyes went to the audience. "What do you think, people?"

The laughter and cheers were wild. Harry blinked. He felt energy. Nothing of which Barty had originally show to the rest of the tributes. He kept his mouth silent, only observing as he crossed his leg over the other, sitting back relaxed. He watched and eyes opened when he saw

Barty's expression change. Eyes wide, mouth slumped, cheeks flushed. He was looking at something in the crowd and Harry's eyes went to follow him. Tom.

He was sitting right where anyone could see him and Barty's attention was flown back to him. And, he could understand why. Harry was wearing silver with purple accents, all which Tom and Francisca chose specifically for him and it seems — they had Tom tailored to be the exact opposite to him. Harry flushed at the implication wondering if anyone besides Barty noticed the similarity. Not caring if they did. This was an implication, a touch. Harry's grin grew wider.

"Well, Harry—may I call you that?" Barty moved in closer, eyes tight on him like a serpent's; Harry wondered about the attitude change as he nodded his head smoothly. "Of course you can, Barty. Everyone else before me has allowed you to." He laughed in sincerity and a partial lie.

Of fucking course you cannot, but he's not exactly allowed to say that - is he?

Harry listened to him with fine eyes as he turned his head back to the crowd to observe Tom. The distraught energy that was radiating from Tom was enough to make Harry worried. His hair was a mess, wet like Harry's but he's willing to bet he didn't put moose in his hair partially because Tom never styles his hair like that nor wanted to copy him, but he looked ugly. As much as Tom Riddle; the Capitol's stunner; could get, mind you. Harry loved every bit of Tom, no matter what he looked like, but Tom looked as if he just stabbed twenty-seven people and got royally screwed over by another. Then, he turned to Barty who looked like venom was punishment enough for Harry. That look - Tom's look; what happened?

Barty began to ask. "So, Harry, what was life like back at home? Have any loved ones?"

Harry smiled despite his worries. He had a game to perform for.

"Yes, I had many. My adoptive family, the Weasleys. My few beaus. My friends, and certainly my community. Everyone was so supportive of each other." The exact opposite to how the Capitol wants them to be. He should've mentioned the Marauders but technically anything joyful can be seen as a crime so perhaps it was for the better. Not as if they can get clout from the Capitol anyway. Barty observed him before his eyes flashed back to Tom who looked dead to the world.

Harry wondered what happened in-between them but Tom looked in no way sane at that very moment to be able to find out.

Barty turned back to him with a small friendly smirk. “A few beaus, did you say?” Harry agreed with him and the people of the Capitol did a wolf whistles back at him. Barty continued, leaning forward on his crossed knee. “How did they feel when you were reaped for the games?”

“As you can imagine,” he says calmly. “They didn’t want me to go; but told me to do anything that I could to survive to come back.”

The adult sighs and nods as if he was acting sympathetic for his situation.

Harry hated the man.

“Harry,” he begins - changing the topic completely. “What did you think of the Capitol when you first came? It would’ve been a very big change from District 12, don’t you think?” Yes, Barty it is a big change. But it’s certainly not the first time he’s been to the Capitol so let's take things out of his ass and bullshit his way to victory.

Harry clears his throat before blossoming a smile onto his face. “I thought the Capitol was very large when I first saw it. 12 is nothing like it in size in comparison.” He sits up straight, looking more towards the audience than Barty. “The architecture is truly amazing here. Also all the luxurious decor. It’s truly to die for here.” He laughed, crinkling his eyes shut in disgust.

He opens them again to hear the audience laugh alongside him, Barty too. Everyone seemed so connected to what he was saying, it was crazy. It made Harry want to vomit and hide in fear. Barty pulled a strand behind his ear. “So…” he said with startling emphasis, face changing to become more curious; interested; desperate, almost. “I think it’s the time of the night to finally speculate why you got the training score that you did, Harry?—I mean, I found it fascinating when I saw it on the card because I think you’re one of the only ones who have gotten nothing before. It’s even more of a spectacle when we just look at you.”

Barty turns back to the audience, “I mean, everyone. Just look at him.”

Harry laughed shyly whilst everyone cheered for him.

“Well,” he rose his hand as if to silence them. “It wasn’t as if I did anything impressive to really capture the game makers’ attention. All I did was look around at what the other tributes did.” Barty rose his eyebrow at that, raising his hand and gesturing as if to go on. He bit his bottom lip, sly. He had to act into the part. “If you can imagine, they don’t change anything by the time the next tribute comes in so since I was the last tribute with a private session. Everyone before me had already gone.” He turned away from Barty’s gaze and to the floor of the stage, sinisterly in-character. “All I had to do was examine what was there, if you know what I mean.”

Barty was taken aback and laughed sinisterly alongside some of the audience that caught on to what he was talking about. “Oh so you just happen to use what was there to see what you could use against your fellow tributes?” He barked out a laugh, shaking his head in awe. “Well, everyone.” He rose a hand towards him. “Harry Potter, everyone.”

The cheers and claps that erupted truly scared him.

Nobody at home ever clapped like this for him.

And with the large, very large amount of people in this room; all looking scarily similar startled him. He gulped before grinning, closing his eyes and waving to the crowd as he stood up, and went to shake Barty’s hand. He moved close to Barty, dangerously close. “Whatever you did to him, I’m going to make sure you regret it.”

Breaking apart from him, Barty’s eyes went wide and Harry gave him a soft but dangerous smile. Harry will live so he can get revenge for Tom. Departing, he waves and blows kisses into the crowd who screams for entertainment. He hopes Dumbledore hates his performance. The son of Lily Evans and James Potter. The symbol of everything he tried to destroy.

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Narcissa flushed at the gorgeous boy who departed from the stage.

She turned her gaze onto Tom who wasn’t paying attention to anything or anyone besides the boy. Harry Potter was his name. And she knew that Tom placed bets on the boy. She wondered what connection the two of them had but Tom’s pupils were dilated as he drank his gin. Narcissa swore the boy’s stage presence was either severely strong or it was just her, but it seemed like everyone amongst their group was feeling it. Nott had to pull against his shirt as if Harry

caused him heart palpitations. Bella was solely focused on Harry and she was breathing heavily. They all were. Lestrange was jealous, that was how bad Harry made them become.

Tom was the one with the strongest reaction, despite all of this. It wouldn't have been obvious to anyone else but knowing Tom and his dislike for anything attractive; this boy garnered all of his attention. His tribute, his new obsession. The redness underneath his eyes seemed to soften the more he watched the boy, his cheeks became redder, and he looked under the weather. Tom's eyes changed from the sharp eagle eyes he usually had to something softer, more in-love. His long eyelashes were more pronounced like this, and Narcissa was in-love like the rest of the women and men at their school. In their city.

This was the teenager everyone was obsessed with; the teenager everyone wanted.

The one that was doe-eyed for a District man.

How life could be so cruel.

Once Harry went off-stage, everyone was buzzed. They all wanted to talk about him. Bets were already being placed on the teenager and Lucius besides her went, "is it too late to change bets now?" She laughed correspondingly, but knew Tom would kill before that would be allowed to happen. Narcissa wondered what Andromeda was thinking at that moment because she also had picked this boy but she must be thinking the exact same thing: he is of a different breed.

Narcissa has never once thought a District tribute could have ever acted like a Capitol citizen before, but Harry gave her a run for her money. She was enthralled. If she didn't know this was the Hunger Games solely for the District she would've thought that Harry was one of them. And what a scary thought that was.

Everyone at their table began to talk again with the exception of Tom.

He was still staring up at the stage as Barty began to talk about the recap of the tributes. The highlights. Something he always did after the interviews were over. He wouldn't stop looking at Barty with murder in his eyes for some reason. One of the Avoxes came over and presented the group with another drink and Narcissa grabbed Tom and tapped him on the shoulder. Tom snapped his head at him, removing him entirely from the screen. He looked like a frightened animal as his eyes flashed between her and his drink. "Uh, Tom. I

thought you would like another drink." She said to him. All their eyes were back on Tom now.

Tom began to calm down ever so slightly. "Oh, alright. Apologises, Narcissa."

He took the drink from her. She put up a hand. "Do not worry about it."

They went back to drinking before they stood up and began to head towards the club they would've usually gone to after the interviews. Tom seemed adamant on staying at the Interviews' Building though. She looped her arm around Lucius'. "Don't worry about it," she tells to the group as Tom stands there, stubborn. "We'll just drink another time."

Walking down the stairs with Bella, beginning to chat to her about Harry, Narcissa turns around to meet Tom's gaze. He looked distraught and completely plastered. He was also looking directly down at her where she only nodded her head to him once, getting it.

He wanted to be alone. That was okay.

Being the President's Successor was a hard job to keep up with after all.

Anything for their President.

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Harry was undressed, wet, and laying in bed by the time the door cracked open. Looking up, exhausted, he softly smiled when he saw Tom walking before him until he saw what shape he was in. Shock in his system immediately, he gulped when he saw lines in his makeup as if he had been crying, the smell of cigarettes and alcohol on him, eyes bleeding red, and everything about himself a mess. "Oh, Tom." He sat up quickly, Tom slowly making his way to the bed almost as if he was embarrassed. Harry wanted to know what had happened but it looked like a touchy subject as he placed both of his hands on his. "Are you alright?"

Tom leaned into his hands and Harry led him forward onto the bed enough so Harry could give him a gentle hug, but even Tom flinched at that. He paused, blinking and staring at the boy. "Hey, Tom." Harry began. "Am I allowed to touch you?"

He didn’t know what happened, but it seemed bad.

However from the wild and terrified look on Tom’s face, he looked as if Harry burned him. He shook underneath him and Tom appeared to be horrified by the prospect of Harry not touching him. So ever so slightly, Harry moved forward and slowly wrapped his arms around Tom’s back. Tom leaned into the touch hesitantly at the beginning before collapsing in on him, stomach laying on his. He began to breathe quickly on Harry’s chest and Harry made no comments about it. Only gently stroking his fingers through his hair as he murmured comforting words.

Harry wasn’t sure what had happened but by the time Tom stopped; he was asleep.

Deciding to follow along, Harry shut his eyes alongside his boy.

He wasn’t in the mood to remember this night at all.

Chapter End Notes

I'm quite tired so no chapter note today
thank you all for the kudos, subscriptions and comments
let me know what you think
gn from where I live, pookies
P S

Breathe & peace

Chapter Summary

Day 1

Chapter Notes

Posted: 18th of February, 2024
I'm in my Lucy Gray Baird era
＜3 loving the TBOSBAS similarities

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Waking up was awful.

There had to be a balance in the world between good and bad but everything about the morning of the Hunger Games was horrific. The soft snores of Tom, who was coiled like a snake around his legs and hips, arms digging into his shoulders as if to never let go - as if they belonged their, chest breathing and trying to bury a spot into his ribcage as if he wanted them to hide away forever made this a lot more harder than it had to be.

Harry kissed his forehead, the precious sleepiness of Tom endearing as Harry slipped out of the bed was adorable. He allowed Tom to sleep as shedded his clothes as if they were skin and jumped into the freezing cold water to wake him up further. Today was the day, he reminded himself. Where he needed to open up his eyes further; where he needed to be fully in-control.

The first day in the arena was usually the scariest, and the most hardcore.

It would be the day where he did the most running, the most fighting, the most everything. His mind would be running twenty four hours a day and it would be certainly smart to be in-control of that before he went in. The nerves that ran through his skin like vessels for blood awakened him. Made him jittery. The freezing cold water of the lake back at home froze him. Froze the nerves. Froze the tension. He allowed his stomach to ache in replacement for his shaky skin. A snake always wore its scales on the outside; with bared teeth of venom. His venom was known, his scales seen but his intelligence was locked away. A snake needed a reason to be scary after all. The brains; intelligence; knowledge was scary. Be the snake, Harry.

Breathe.

He washed his hair with simple shampoos and conditioners that he found and made sure that he didn't shave. He didn't want to chaff whilst on the run. He did cut his nails though and made sure that his hair was cut so none of it would hinder him. He brushed his teeth, put on a simple pair of underwear garments before checking out his eyes. Harry needed glasses and on the first day, they provided him long-lasting contacts that he would be able to wear in the arena. Back at the orphanage when he was eleven, he did have glasses and he escaped, keeping them; but ever since then, his prescription has never been changed once so his eyesight has enviably gotten worse. Harry knew that if he was to win, he would be able to get prescription glasses from then onwards.

Tom woke up and entered the bathroom exhausted despite having more than ten hours of sleep. He slumped up against Harry's side and he didn't say anything about it. "Go have a shower," he suggested. "I want you to be able to send me off."

He left Tom alone in the bathroom and opened his phone.

Deciding to record something of himself so Tom had something to keep him company whilst he was in the arena, he began with tired eyes - he could see from the camera being a reflected version of himself, "hey Tom. The morning of. You're in the shower and I just wanted to tell you that I appreciate you and everything you've done for me." He sighs but puts on a pretty smile for him, "I'm quite terrified honestly for the prospect that I'm going to go into the arena, but I know that knowing you you won't allow that to happen." He bites his lip. "And I know that every step of the way that you'll be with me, so you don't have to tell me that, y'know. I know and I truly appreciate that." He glances over towards the door where he hears the shower turn on. "I wish that I can stay for certain that I will survive but I don't know. I cannot say for certain that I will survive but for you, I will continue to think that - despite every bone in my body telling me that I cannot." He takes another deep breath.

"But for my insanity, if I don't make it. I want to at least say something to you about it." He tells the camera honestly. "I want you to live. I want you to do everything you want to. Strive for." Harry smiles solemnly at the camera. "As President or just as another person; I want you to be happy."

"If you're the President, I know you will do well; the Hunger Games

isn't my cuppa-tea for your knowledge but I wish you do everything that you think is reasonable in the world. Make the best political decisions as you can, and change the world for the better. Perhaps correct the mistakes that Dumbledore has made, but do better. For me and my memory." He begins to cry but wipes his tears. He doesn't want to cry; he cannot yet. It's not his time. "Tom. I also want you to know that I love you so much. Very dearly and that if I am near the end of my days, all I am doing is thinking about you and our memories together because they are some of the happiest I've ever had. Me with you, I think is the best I have ever been."

"I'd also like to say, whatever happened between you and Barty; kill him if you must. I hated the way he looked at you."

Harry took another deep breath. "I want you to live happily. That's my greatest wish for you. So do. No matter how you feel or want; I want you to be happy so be. Do the things that would make you happy. Cause destruction or peace - anything you do, I live through so make my memory bright." He ended the video and took the time to recover from all the words. Words were his romance, no wonder it took all the energy from him.

Once Tom was dressed from the shower, and the world started to turn lively again; Fleur came into their bedroom to tell Harry to get ready for Morgan and Rhodes to come in and dress him. However, before that, he ate alongside Tom and waited before they came in. Morgan was hurried for some reason and began to examine the clothes in the covers. Tom became more energetic once he saw the materials they were made out of. He fiddled with the fabric between his two fingers. "This material is made for extreme weather conditions. However, it's also supposed to be light for less harsh temperatures. I think you're somewhere less humid and less cold. Somewhere with nice weather, but for measures to be taken care of regardless." He relays.

"So something for me to be worried about?" Harry questioned.

"No, but make sure to be careful of where you move. This can be ripped easily enough."

The teenager nodded at him.

Harry dressed himself and then Morgan and Rhodes added extra additions to his person. Beginning to tie his hair back so none of it was in his face - but, a few curls did escape and curl around his face when he saw himself in the mirror. Then, he noticed a pendant was

clipped around his neck. Morgan smiled, the gold opening up to showcase the attachment of Percy's letter. He began to smile but sobered up his expression before he could cry. No more crying, until he thought it was at least safe enough to.

Then, it was time. Shoes were on, outfit was on, everything was ready.

It was also time to say goodbye.

Turning to Tom, he ran and jumped onto him who opened up his arms in acceptance. He landed on his chest and he began to kiss his cheek and neck. "Everything is going to be okay," he tells himself more than Tom. "I'm going to be okay, I will be back - I will —" he shakes his head before whispering into his ear. "I'll be back for you, Tom."

He spends a minute in his hold listening to the gentle words of Tom before Morgan sighs, grumbling. "As much as I don't want you two love birds to depart, we unfortunately have a game to attend to. Come on, Harry."

Pressing a messy kiss to Tom's cheek, he breaks away from Tom and heads over to where Morgan was standing. "I'll see you and your cheek later, Tom. Don't you forget that I'm there fighting to, okay?" Tom nods and he leaves reluctantly alongside Morgan and Rhodes.

Fleur was standing there waiting before both Harry and Sedge to emerge so once the two of them were standing there, they were walked to the elevator where they took their stop to the first floor and were followed by peacekeepers to their destination. The aeroplane take-off. Walking alongside Morgan, Rhodes being left behind as Bonavich walked beside Sedge, the four of them found themselves on the aircraft as Harry was told to sit between Alistar and Susan. Sedge was told to sit on the opposite sitting arrangement between District 9's girl and Imelda.

Susan turned to him. "Thoughts?"

"My brain is eating itself."

Susan bobs her head beside him. "My thoughts exactly."

It was weird talking to the Career tributes like this. Alistar turned to the two of them as they were the only ones talking amongst the group of twenty-four. "I really want to sleep more. Couldn't of they started the games later at night. I feel like the rich people would've rather wanted it at six o'clock than twelve where they would've had to

reduce the amount where they drank the night before." Harry hums in agreement, Susan pointing her finger at Alistar. "It's a serious issue, I'm finding. Although, I feel like it's the best time for us to start the games. Six o'clock at night would be asking for trouble."

"Hah," Persephone laughed from across the seating arrangement. "Definitely."

Valor grumbled. "I certainly would've just decided to sleep instead of play."

"Imagine the Hunger Games but entirely at night," Harry mumbles - still feeling the morning energy in the room. "It would be ten times more deadly than what we have now."

Susan snorts at his comment. "I'd drink to that but I don't have a glass on me."

"Honestly," Alistar sighs.

Then, the game makers started to enter the room where they asked for their arm. Alistar was first in the line and they watched as he was injected with a tracker. Knitting his eyebrows together and allowing them to take his right hand, Harry gritted his teeth at the pain. It wasn't anything pleasant but not the worst feeling he's ever experienced, although he would never want to go through it again. Susan was next and took the precautions from his expression to anticipate the pain. Alistar rested his head up against the metal wall as they were clipped into their seats.

Whilst flying to the arena, Valor bursted out with the comment. "That hurt like a sonnavibitch."

Harry, bemused by his accent, commented, "District 2's accents sound really nice. Smooth, easy on the tongue."

Susan nodded along but Valor only bore his eyes at him as if he didn't expect him to talk. "Yeah, District 2 has this thing where they like to shorten words and add harsh definitions to their certain vowels. I don't mind it but it's definitely a first where someone's commented on it."

He shrugged his shoulders. "All of us here besides our District partner have different accents."

Alistar glanced at him. "I forgot about that fact."

“Yes,” Pearl huffed, annoyed. “I’ve really forgotten about the fact that all of us here are about to fight each other to death and that this isn’t some random school camp the twenty-four of us have been randomly chosen to go on together.” Laurent gives her a look but doesn’t correct her. Only adds on, “I suppose we just have to do our best to survive. Can’t exactly have a grudge against any of you since only one of us at the end will know the victor.”

“True,” Susan comments. “I’d also like to drink to that.”

Harry smirks but his smug demeanour lowers by the time they’re told to move along. Leaving the aircraft, they are taken into an underground tunnel which is underneath the arena they’re about to fight to the death in. Harry gulps, and Alistar watches him. The two of them walked beside each other. “May the odds be ever in your favour,” he says high-pitched as he’s directed into his room. The group behind him bursts out laughing as he has the door shut behind him.

He is alone as he glances around at the contents in the room.

He leans against the table’s edge as he waits for something to happen.

At the farthest wall in the room was the infamous tube all the tributes were rose in. He waited until he was given some sign to get in the bloody thing. He was wondering what District 12 was like as he waited, what Tom’s reaction was, as he nervously stretched out his jitters. Better to run stretched out than run constricted.

Then, he saw the door open from behind him.

His head zipped to the door where he saw Morgan.

He sighed, before deciding it wasn’t anything he didn’t mind. “You’ve come to bid me a goodbye.” Harry jokes before Morgan begins to fix his hair.

The teenager allows her to as she fluffs up his jacket and shirt underneath it. “There’s nothing I can say to you that you don’t already know. But,” she holds his jacket with passion before her eyes burn up at him. “Out of everyone, you’ve got the highest chance at winning. You’ve got the greatest chance at surviving. I’ve heard you and Tom discussing it; beauty, intelligence, and strength; and this so-called survival, but when I think about you and where you land on the scale. Everything is high but your survival skills are the highest.”

Harry blinked back tears. “I’m not sure how Tom knows you but it’s

more than just him betting on you. He knows you and whatever you've had to do that split that, it's certainly received and taught you higher survival skills than all those other tributes. Just breathe and imagine everything you already know hanging nearby on a fishing rod. Able to be caught but something that takes patience. Use the skills and extend upon them; this is much of a lesson as it is a punishment."

Then, the overhead speaker began. "One minute before take off."

Harry shivered at the statement.

"Harry," she begins. "Those Careers. They don't mean anything. They're average. You're not. You're from an outlier district, and you're strong. It doesn't mean anything that they're there. Scary. Brooding. They're victors; volunteers; they're meant to be." Morgan puts a hand to his cheek, Harry leaning into it because he was a sucker for touch. "You're so much more than a label. Your fluid like water. Ever-changing. Adaption, that's what you are. Tom likes you for a reason - I trust his judgement. Live."

"Thirty seconds until take off."

He began to walk towards the tube that was becoming ever more scary. "Last minute advice?"

Harry stepped into the tube and turned around to Morgan.

She looked like a strong warrior in that moment with her hair done in a braid bun, eyes sharp, skin tight. "The first day of the games in adrenaline. Make sure you're able to breathe through the rush. And remember, it's all chance."

"Fifteen seconds until take off."

"They have outliers win for 'supposed' equality sometimes. Make sure that's you."

"Five, four, three, two, one…"

He watched his life flashed before his eyes.

The tube was shut before him and he began to watch as he was raised above the platform. He took one last glance at Morgan, normality, who blew him a sorrowful kiss before he wasn't able to see her anymore. Then, he adjusted his eyes to his new environment he was

going to have to become accustomed to. Glancing around, he felt himself go faint.

There was no one in sight.

Trapped in a building of sorts, with small rooms - Harry wondered if the tributes were in the different rooms across from him which made him worried since there were weapons and food and water in this room… he paused, glancing plainly at the things before him. There were weapons, food, and water without a single person beside him being in this room. It didn't look like enough for the entire twenty-four of them so there must be others in different rooms, but… why was it laid out plainly like this. Then, the countdown began.

"Sixty, fifty-nine, fifty-eight, fifty-seven, fifty-six…"

This was weird.

Never once before were the tributes separated like this.

There were no windows, he found that he could see to alert him of what terrain was outside or if there was an outside at all. Harry paused, feeling ill at the sudden change. The Hunger Games usually lasted a couple of weeks. Sometimes nearly a month, once back at the beginning but that was before the Capitol could really control the terrain like they did nowadays. There must be something stopping them from stabbing each other all at once. A danger that lurked in these rooms. Harry had to find out what or else he was going to be in big trouble.

He couldn't hide like this, especially when it looked as if cameras were in every room.

Taking deep breaths, not knowing who was going to be beside him, he needed to think clearly.

"Twenty, nineteen, eighteen, seventeen, sixteen, fifteen…"

Think, think, think.

He needed to first detect the immediate danger he was in: get rid of the unknown variables.

"Five, four—" he was ready.

"Three, two—" he held his breath.

“One—“ he released it. “And may the 74th Annual Hunger Games begin,” the overhead speaker announced.

Harry took one step off the podium and slowly made his way over to the weapons, unsure if he should even go to touch them but decided they were safe after nothing happened when he grabbed them. He took a look at what was there. A backpack, canned goods, three bottles of water, two throwing knives, one axe, and a single large two-sided knife with a jagged side to it. He began to pack the stuff. Harry also noted the roll of bandages and bowl. Putting them all away into the back pack, he kept his jacket on. He felt as if it was more usual on then off.

Deciding to take a chance, he opened one of the doors that he expected to see another tribute in but he was wrong. There was a single tube that looked big enough to fit a tribute in. Harry blinked in surprise, wondering what that was supposed to mean; it meant there had to be more floors to the building he speculated as he began to creep around further.

If Harry was wrong, then he was dead; but he had an assessment after creeping into enough empty rooms that there were other tributes on the same floor as him. However, not many. He also had a query that there were stairs or some kind of way for the other tributes to have access to his floor. And Harry, the floors below and above. Except, he hadn’t found it yet and he wasn’t sure if he wanted to.

Harry was also beginning to suspect that in the other rooms that weren’t his arrival room; there was a singular item that could help you in the form of a canned food, bottle of water, or weapon that was available. It nerved Harry as he opened one door and peeked through it creeping into the next room. Then, he heard the first sound of life. The cannon.

And ten minutes later, the next cannon, and the next.

What he heard next made Harry freeze; shrieking began and then screaming before a cannon hit the loudspeaker. In the next room or the next room over, someone had just died and it was most likely due to one of the Careers. Fuck this shit. Knowing where the most trouble from their floor was coming from, he ran back in the opposite direction. Opening the doors hurriedly, he wasn’t wasting time. He wasn’t dying today, thank you very much.

It was also very plausible now that there were different tributes

together on different floors. Harry wondered how many but knew for sure he wasn't on the lowest or highest level as he kept back into the room he came from, deciding to sit back on the podium he arose on; he took a breather. He was already disliking this year's Hunger Games more than last year's.

Then, the door opposite to the one Harry ran back into shuttered; a tribute beside the Career.

Eyes snapping to the noise, he waited with his knife out before he locked eyes onto a familiar friendly sight. "Imelda," he smiled, thankful. She had her own knife raised but took a deep breath when she saw him. The two of them instinctively knowing they weren't going to fight the other, she walked in and shut the door from behind her. Imelda began, "thank fuck, Harry, seriously—" she shook her head as she slid against the door behind her.

"I swear," he grumbled, moving his hands to his face in angst, "that was so nerve-racking."

"Honestly." She agrees, she even laughed.

But that faded when another cannon went off.

Immediately at that, she jumped up. "Ladislao."

Harry turned to her and blinked, remembering him. They needed to help him. Standing up with his mind decided, if anyone was going to be successful allies it was the two District 10 tributes. Imelda and Ladislao. He trusted them enough that they weren't going to betray him instantaneously if Imelda's show of trust was anything to be said.

Pointing to that door Harry had just come out of, he began. "A heard a scream down a few rooms over when I was trying to see what was happening. If anything, a Career is down there by themselves, and a cannon went off immediately after. If the person wasn't been removed already, we'll be able to know if Ladislao's at least not dead directly where we're around yet." Imelda nods, and Harry decides to open the door to let her in. The two of them examine the room before progressing further.

Imelda explains, "if we're fighting together - there's less of a chance to be taken down by a single Career this immediate into the games."

"I agree," he gulps.

She turns to him with a serious look. “With a score of nothing; I don’t believe that for a second.”

Harry laughed nervously, continuing to assess the rooms they were progressing into with his knife out and ready to attack. Imelda wasn’t the sort of person to attack someone unless they posed a serious threat to her. And Harry knows he would be one of the last people on that list. He shivers, feeling even more nervous as they were coming to the source of the scream. “I’ll be honest with you, since - no one else is here. I didn’t want to pose as a serious threat to the Careers.”

“Because you’re strong?” Imelda rose her eyebrow at him, snickering nervously. “Yeah, we know.”

“You know?”

“Most of the Career tributes were talking about you when you were in the bathroom one time,” she admits honestly. “About you avoiding the weaponry sections for a reason - that you were hiding something.” Imelda licks her lips, eyes following the different rooms’ layouts. “I brought it up with Ladislao and that boy has an intuition as the devil. It’s seriously an issue how intuitive he is and he said he also knew. So when you got a zero we were all surprised but not shocked. As if we expected you to pull some of that bull.”

“Oh, well…” he shrugs his shoulders. “Either way, it doesn’t matter anymore.”

“No.” She agrees, “for any other arena that trick would’ve worked. And I get why you tried that.”

“Because of you, and Rex, and Silver, and 7?” He answers.

She hums, eyes softening as they open the next door. Harry was growing more anxious since the next door over was the one he heard the screams behind. “Yeah, but it’s not only us. Like the Careers are pretty old this year. There are only a few little ones which I’m upset about, but what can we do about it?” She asks hypothetically. “Sixteen,” she says. “Yeah, it is young comparatively but no one is not looking at those muscles - Harry.”

“Ah, yeah.” He agrees. When they get closer to the door, he tells her. “This was where I heard the screams behind. Um, let’s see I guess.”

Imelda opened the door and peered around the wood before she paused, blinking. Then, her expression changed from shock to

horrified in a second. Harry pushed the door completely open so he would be able to see the scene as well. His expression also went from shocked to horrified. The girl from District 9 with her tiny body was on the ground with a single knife in her hand as her face was completely destroyed. An axe, it seemed, went through her head thousands of times; completely smashing her brains and bones into the ground. The rest of her body was left untouched as she was completely mutilated.

He began to hear sobs come from Imelda as she broke down in front of him. Harry patted her shoulder comfortingly as she went to her knees, crying for the girl neither of them knew well. He sniffled and cried without meaning to. It was trauma, this.

Knowing they were laughing minutes earlier to being completely severed like this.

The difference between the districts.

What made them different.

They stayed in the room for a good amount of time. There were three doors in the room and it was obvious which room the Career who did this picked. Imelda and Harry, sour-faced, stepped into the next room where the Career went into; they found nothing, despite being anticipated to find something, someone. No one was there. It was as if the two of them were alone, the sound of another cannon going off to alert them that they weren't. There were still battles happening.

Imelda began, anxious. "There is a staircase somewhere; there must."

"If there is," he followed suit. "It must mean that all of the Careers from the top levels are going to come down to this floor at some point."

"There must be a ground floor."

"That leads to the outside," he nods.

"We're fucked."

"Definitely."

Imelda leans up against the wall as Harry sits on one of the chairs they had laying around. It wasn't comfortable but it certainly was something to sit on. Another cannon went off. That was eight cannons.

It hadn't even felt like they had been in there for very long but eight people were already dead. The two of them began to start their game-plan. "Finding Ladislao should be our first priority. Being in a group of three versus sixteen should give us an advantage." Harry hummed alongside her. "We also have food together that will last a week if we ration it well."

She observes him, moving a curl behind her ear. "I'm guessing you didn't over-indulge in yourself over the week."

"No," he sighed, "as much as I would've liked to - I like starving less."

Imelda stood from against the wall. "We should try and find the staircases."

Harry nodded his head. "Now, I really wished I bought a watch for my district token." He admitted and Imelda snickered, the two of them walking through the various rooms on the floor; trying to identify where the staircases were. Knowing the game makers, they weren't going to make it so easy as putting them together.

It felt like it had been hours by the time they found the first set of staircases that went downstairs to a very dark floor. Imelda nervously stared at the floor, "remember when you said that being in-the-dark for an entire Hunger Games would be scary. What happens if there is an entire floor that is in the dark that Ladislao's in."

"Fuck, I jinxed it."

"Okay, maybe not jinxed but it's definitely nerving."

"Especially since nothing seems wrong with our floor," Imelda adds, Harry groaning with annoyance. That was the worst, anticipation. It made his body feel all jiggly and anxious as he glanced down to the floor. Harry told her, "if we go downstairs at least we'll know that something about this floor is suspicious as fuck as know that the floor below is completely in the dark." He makes a gesture at her, "do you have a torch?"

"No," Imelda grumbles. "I guess nobody will."

"Okay… I also don't think this is the bottom floor." Harry admits. "So we're on the third floor?"

"And that means there would be a ground floor too."

“Shit,” Harry says for pure commentary.

Imelda snickers gesturing to the staircase nervously. “I’m ready when you are.”

The two of them begin to creep down the set of stairs nervously. Imelda holds Harry’s arm which Harry thinks he needs a lot more than Imelda but that’s besides the point. The two of them begin to walk connected into the completely dark rooms. “Fuck,” Imelda began to curse. “This is so nerve-racking. How do they expect any of us to fight in the completely dark like this?—it’s a curse.” Harry grumbled his agreement. “Where do you reckon Ladislao would be?”

“This floor maybe,” he admitted reluctantly. “If he wasn’t already dead, he would’ve hid here.”

“Yeah,” Imelda agrees. “I get you.”

They began to walk together, glancing at the different rooms they were entering. Harry nearly trips at one point and Imelda supports him. He glances down at his feet and smells something like blood. He gasped before grabbing Imelda’s upper arm. He lifted one of his shoes and touched a sticky substance that was on them. “This—this—oh my fucking—“ he takes deep breathes, and Imelda chokes.

“That’s someone?”

She bends down to touch the body Harry tripped over and she shrieked when she was met with blood and a damaged body. Imelda turns to Harry, “it cannot be Ladislao. I just touched tits.” Harry blinked before saying, “I can think of numerous people who have,” he was trying to find the head of the body before finding her breasts accidentally before moving up further to touch the hair of the teenager. “Those estimated sized breasts and this…” he begins to feel her hair and unlooses it from its braid. “This is Persephone.”

Imelda coughed. “She’s dead? It’s she a Career?”

“Remember, not everyone strong this year is just a Career.”

“You’re thinking either 7, Ladislao, Silver, or Rex?”

“—Yes, but I’m honestly thinking 7.” Harry begins to move towards where a door would be with Imelda holding his arm. “Ladislao would very much rather keep quiet than say anything on this floor. Silver would hesitate and Persephone wouldn’t. Rex is more of ‘I’ll fight if I

absolutely have to' which isn't a bad way to go about it, he's strong enough not to worry about it. Although, 7 wouldn't discriminate. She'd fight because she can."

Imelda grumbles. "That means she's still here or upstairs on our floor —or downstairs on the next."

"Yes," Harry sighed. "What a predicament."

They continue walking.

———

Narcissa sat on the family's couch with the games on the big screen. Bella sat beside her with a large bowl of popcorn. It was a Tuesday but they were allowed to skip the rest of the weeks until the Hunger Games was over, which was nice. Andromeda also was allowed to skip school which she liked since the girl didn't want to hear anything more about the Hunger Games but it meant that she avoided her and Bella like the plague. Their parents were at work. Narcissa took a few pieces of popcorn and held them in her hand as she elegantly ate a few at a time. Bella hummed excitedly. "This year is different with the whole prison aspect to it."

"Yeah, it's also inventive that they're trying out the whole 'perspectives' thing." On their phones, a new addition to the Hunger Games app has been that anyone can watch any one of the tribute's sole perspectives. But like always, whoever you want to see the most can be forwarded onto your televisions and be able to watch it like this; there was also the television program Barty liked to comment on - about what the most action was happening in the arena. At the moment, Narcissa and Bella put Silver, Harry (and as a result, District 10's girl), Alistar, and 7.

Silver was on the fourth floor with District 8's girl, District 5's girl, and Valor. However, Valor only killed District 8's girl before running off to the third floor. The fourth floor was giving Narcissa a headache as it was completely bright. The third floor had nothing in it - which both girls speculated to be not true, that something was going to happen in the third floor but not yet; a false sense of security before their eyes were distracted on Alistar's complete killing spree. He was the sole Career at the top floor of the prison, and he killed District 6's boy, District 7's boy, and District 9's girl. Bella wolf whistled at his bloodlust but Narcissa found it upsetting.

Alistar was trying to stay awake due to the gas they had in the room

so realistically whenever he found another tribute on his floor, they'd already be asleep so it was easier for him to kill them. After the three kills where all of them were asleep, he knocked himself out whilst trying to find the downstairs - coming to his own conclusion there were multiple floors. The girl from 7 on the other hand was all about the kill the strongest. She was on the second floor where it was complete darkness, murdering Persephone after Persephone killed District 8's boy. Narcissa and Bella were both focused on Harry and Imelda, despite this. Since they could pick up what they were saying, Bella snickered. "They're both really funny."

"They're looking for her district partner," Narcissa reminds. "Do you think Imelda and Ladislao won't betray him?"

"I'm not sure, Imelda might have an attachment to the golden boy now, don't you think?" Bella takes a handful of popcorn and stuffs them all in her mouth. "I would, I mean - he's so funny. I would date Harry solely for his comments. It's good that he's hot and intelligent at the same time."

"They're the first alliance to happen in this game. District 11's girl and Laurent were next."

"A trio alliance, well they're heading in the right direction." Bella becomes smug. "The best place for District 10's boy to hide is the second floor. Hidden away." Narcissa watches as Harry and Imelda set up camp for the night, lighting a match they realised they had with some wood and paper they found. Harry began to turn to Imelda, saying. "How do you want the sleeping shifts to work?"

"You sleep first," she says. "I'll stay awake. We'll switch when you wake up."

Harry agrees and he begins to sleep lying on a couch. It looked comfortable as Imelda put her jacket on top of him as she began to venture off. Glancing at the time, it was nearly ten o'clock. Their parents would be coming home soon after they had a few drinks with their friends. Also, Andromeda was likely to return home after her disappearance. Bella nudges Narcissa. "Look what District 10's doing."

Imelda began to try and find things in the next rooms over that she could see due to keeping the door open. She brought more paper and wood to the fire. Imelda began to glance around for a candle which she found after a lot of searching and began to search in their area for her District 10 partner. Narcissa was mad. She let Harry fall asleep,

promising to protect him, but she wasn't doing anything in the slightest and she can understand why she did it; she had no qualms of leaving him there, unprotected.

Bella glared at Imelda. "I want to kill her myself. What do you think Tom is thinking?"

"The same thing," Narcissa was on the verge of killing Imelda as well.

The door opened and their parents arrived home. Their mum took one look at the screen and trudged over whilst their father began to put the groceries they brought away. She took a seat beside Narcissa, watching Imelda walk away from Harry. Never has Narcissa nor Bella seen their mother look as murderous as she did right then, "how dare she?"

Narcissa shrugged her shoulders. "Bella," she turned to her sister, "add-on Ladislao's perspective."

Opening up her phone, she watched as Ladislao crept closer to Harry than Imelda. "At this point," their mother began, "Ladislao is going to find Harry before Imelda comes close to finding him. And Harry's asleep. Thank god there aren't many tributes on this floor."

"Who else is on the floor?"

"Pearl."

Narcissa and Bella went wide eyed. "Ah shit."

The door opened again to which the three women on the couch jumped. Andromeda stared at the three whose attentions' were snapped onto her. She wore a backpack with all her essentials before her eyes went flashing to the screen. It was of mainly of Harry Potter sleeping, Imelda Garcia with a candle - searching the different rooms of the same floor, and of Ladislao Ladrón creeping around. She decides to ask. "Was Harry and Imelda in an alliance?"

"Yes," her youngest sister hisses. "But then Imelda went off to try and find him."

Andromeda could understand. Heading over to the kitchen, she made herself a simple salad before taking it back up to her room. Before she could make it to the stairs, their mother; Druella, spoke up. "Aren't you going to stay and watch, Andy?" She shook her head and said that she would much rather prefer watching some of her other favourite

shows that were on. She retreated up the stairs and to her room.

Upon shutting her door, she went to her computer and turned on the Hunger Games. She put Harry's, Imelda's, and Ladislao's perspectives on top of the song "Rich Like A Dragon" by the Fayes. She opened the door to her private bathroom, connecting the screen to her bathroom television as she watched the story unfold from where she drew a bath. The lyrics were more District than Capitol but still, anything the Capitol liked was what they received. No other District member besides the people in 3 would know who the Fayes were.

All the frets are sung
All the heads are hung
All the people are fighting for their young,
What the Capitol doesn't know
Is what the Capitol doesn't know
True happiness is what lies below
In the Districts were the birds are young,
People can say scram but we won't leave
This is home
This is what makes home,
We make our tombs
We wait for the Katniss' to bloom,
We are what makes it home,
This is our home

Harry is huddled up with Imelda's jacket and Andromeda knows that she gifted it to him not out of respect or their alliance, but for the sake that they're District. They're one in the same. Andromeda grabbed the wine that was in the fridge of her bathroom and poured herself a glass. She was wondering what Ted thought of this all. That Imelda was in the right, wanting to look for her District partner, or solely Harry's thought for being a bleeding heart.

We don't need no jewels,
The love doesn't need to be cruel,
All we are, are fools
We never need to be defanged to be loved,
Our anger is our beauty,
All we need is our blood
And our duty
Which doesn't make us rich like a dragon

Andromeda grabs the shampoos from her stand and begins to lather her brown hair in the substances. She watches as Imelda finds a dead

body of Satin Deere. Andromeda thinks it's karma but in reality, Imelda didn't deserve it. None of them did. This was all the Capitol's doing. And if anything, if there was a rebellion that was going to happen, Andromeda would assist. Alongside Ted and her… best not to think about it.

Don't need no fashion;
Unlike a dragon
Only need a wagon;
Unlike a dragon
Only need a cabin;
Unlike the riches of dragons
Only need satin;
Unlike the mouth of dragons
Only need our compassion;
Unlike dragons
Our need our assassin;
Unlike the President of Panem

Andromeda giggled at the last verse.

She wet her hair and got rid of the suds in her hair before she added conditioner. The Fayes were magnificent when Andromeda was thirteen, she was by herself one day after school since she was the oldest and no longer went to their primary school, she decided to head to a record store where she saw their album. The record store owner, Dean, said that the Capitol allowed them to be sold only for the fact they didn't want to be deemed as discriminatory to the Capitol citizens. Andromeda brought the "Fly Like Mockingjays" Album before she brought the lot. She also listened to them online which was a safer option than pulling out the albums all the time, but they're her prized possessions.

What makes the Districts' human.

To remind herself of the enemy.

Our deeds do us well,
The junk is never junk but someone's else's treasure,
We make our district's cell cosy,
The children are together,
We ignore the dragon's nose,
All of us crouched down together when there is poor weather,
Those of the river's daughters only oppose
And we take care of our own

Your daughter, your son
My wife, your husband
Keep your hands high,
Think of your hopes; your dreams; the sky
Keep them out of reach from the greed
Of the rich like a dragon
One's who tastes never satisfy

The instrumental accompaniment began to really take off during the ending of the song.

Andromeda got out of the bath and wondered if she went tomorrow to the record store if Dean was finally going to allow her to head into the back room where all of the other District records were. She really wanted to find one from 12 since that's where Harry Potter was from. Andromeda kind of wanted to know what type of music he grew up with. The boy was still asleep when Ladislao crept ever-so closer to the room he was in. Imelda getting closer to Pearl. Andromeda wrapped a towel around herself as she headed back to her room and turned off the television in her bathroom. The television in her room, with the next track: "The Devil's Name, Fair" by the Fayes played as she slipped into her bed, naked; wondering what she would do if she separated from her family due to the upcoming - very fueled rebellion she could sense on the horizon.

She would leave for the sake of her family.

And she wondered if Narcissa would come with her.

Chapter End Notes

tired, so no comment,
surprise song next "I Almost Do"
also forgot to mention, I'm loving u guys
thx for the kudos + subscriptions,
comments are elite tooo <3
P S

hoax

Chapter Summary

Day 2

Chapter Notes

Posted: 21st of February, 2024

AHHHHHHHHHHHH

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry woke up to the sound of his name. “*Harry*?”

With the knife in his hand, he pointed it at the person who called out his name. He became doe-eyed as he saw Ladislao before him. He called out Ladislao’s name. “Ladislao… is that really you?” The teenager from 10 nodded his head and Harry glanced around, looking for Imelda. “Hey, do you know where Imelda went?—she was here before and was going to wake me up, and switch night shift once I woke up. Um,” he felt embarrassed but at least Ladislao was with him.

“I think she went to find me,” Ladislao said nervously as if that was going to tick Harry off. And it did.

“That bitch,” he said, sighing. “Whatever can I do about it?—she has a mind of her own.”

Ladislao laughed. Harry wasn’t overly mad but he wasn’t happy. It was nothing to kill Imelda over but he knows if it was anyone else, they would’ve taken that betrayal as something detrimental to their relationship. Unfortunately, staying in a trio for now would be more beneficial than continuing on by himself. Ladislao took a seat beside Harry. Now that Ladislao was closer to the dimming light Harry was able to see how bad he looked. With a busted lip, dark circles underneath his eyes, and shaking hands; Harry stood up and began to try and put more fuel on the fire. When Ladislao came up to join him, Harry pointed a finger at him. “No, you stay.”

“What happened? Besides you, I haven’t run into any other tributes.”

“Not even the dead ones?” Harry rose his eyebrow, questioning how he got his busted lip.

Ladislao noticed his wandering eyes. “Oh, this?”

“Yeah,” Ladislao touched his lip gently, wincing as he pressed against it. “If you could imagine, it being all dark - I almost stumbled off my podium before it was time and accidentally tripped standing off of it once it was time to start. My lip, ergo, is now like this.” Harry thought that made sense as Ladislao sat there, looking young. Opening up the doors, he glanced down, searching for Imelda. She wasn’t anywhere to be seen. Only if she stayed, he shook his head, bothered. She still must be on this floor, he concludes. If Imelda thought he wasn’t there, she would’ve come and collected him for them to move on to the next.

Harry opened the other two doors to peak out of them, nervously. Then, he saw the soft glow of a light from across the large room from the middle one. Blinking for a moment and squinting, he saw what appeared to be Imelda. Deciding to take the risk, he began to hiss at her. Since it was only the two of them in the room, her head zipped over to him. “Imelda! Imelda,” he began. “Ladislao’s here!”

The teenage girl came running over and Ladislao peaked out from the door. Luckily, it was Imelda, and Ladislao opened his arms to hug her. She practically leaped into his arms but then gave Harry an apologetic expression. Harry said nothing about what she did turning his head back to the room. He thought to himself: would it be better to abandoned them whilst they were still vulnerable or stay whilst they were at their strongest?

Harry didn’t think and choose intuitively. *Stick together. Everyone is on different floors, it’s not like the normal Career pack this year. They’ve all been split up and there are strongest outlier districts. Take the chance and partner-up. Once the numbers are lower, then split up.* Ladislao stumbled back into the room alongside Imelda, then she opened her mouth to apologise. “I’m so sorry, Harry. I—“

He shook his head, smiling sadly. “It’s okay, I get it.”

It looked as if she wanted to say more but Harry glared at her; silencing her.

Moving to sit on the table, he crossed his legs. Imelda moved to sit on one of the seats and Ladislao took the other free one. Harry leant his head on his hand, thinking about what they should do next. “The Career pack is split up as we know. Persephone is dead. 7 was most likely to kill her.”

“Satin’s dead, I found his body as I was roaming around,” Imelda

supplied.

“Persephone, Satin, District 9 girl; eight tributes are dead. Both District 10 tributes aren’t, nor am I. So we can guess who is still alive. I bet Alistar, Susan, 7, Silver, the two from 4, Valor, and Rex are still alive,” Ladislao agrees with him, Imelda pointing at Harry. She began, “I think we can rule out that the top levels are going to be the least crowded.”

“You reckon either Alistar or Valor are up there?”

“Most likely, I think if given the chance; the weaker tributes would’ve escaped outside.”

“I can agree with you on that.”

Ladislao yawns, the two of them turning to him who looks exhausted. As if he hasn’t slept since the beginning of the games. And if Harry’s correct in his assumption, it’s been at least a day by now. He gestures his head at Ladislao to Imelda, “hey, Ladislao. You probably should get some sleep. And you to Imelda, but I think we should take turns again.” He takes out some of his canned food, beginning to pick at it with his hands. “We’re probably one of the only alliances at the moment so we can afford to take a break.”

Imelda began to fiddle with her black hair, putting it up into a ponytail. She leant back on the seat as Harry laid Imelda’s jacket on Ladislao. He began to eat his food again, Imelda sighing - observing Harry. “Downstairs is probably going to become a shit-show as well. As it turns out you were right. We’re on the second floor. There is another floor beneath us before the ground floor. I found the set of staircases.” Harry hummed and ate his tuna.

He pointed at it. “You should eat, Imelda. There’s no time to lose with this food.”

“Delicious?”

“Absolutely; you know, I wouldn’t have suspected that they would put this kind of food in here. I expected more grains and dirt like back at home but no,” he snickers, jokingly. “They actually have luxuries like tuna here.” Hungry, she went to her backpack and pulled it open. The two of them ate their food together as Ladislao began to snore beside them.

Whilst he had time to think, he wondered what Tom was getting up to

and if he saw the video recording he made. It wasn't an overly pressing issue if he hadn't but it was still something that kept him engaged. To know that no matter what, he at least said all the things he would've liked to if he didn't make it out of this place alive. Harry watched as Imelda began to doze in and out of consciousness - Harry protecting the perimeters. He put furniture in front of the doors and made sure that they were locked inside. He'd rather fight these guys than an unknown enemy.

Harry began to think of Tom more as he sat on the table with his legs crossed.

If he was drinking with his friends, talking about the odds of the games. Or if he was drinking and crying himself stupid. Or if he was scheming with some poor Capitol investors to help him. Or if he was playing right into the President's hand. Either way, it entertained him enough to stay awake. He observed what he had in his bag before he realised he really had to go and take a piss. He flushed at the growing pressure in his stomach, knowing he shouldn't abandon the two of them. So he waited.

When Ladislao woke up, Harry jumped off from the table, explaining in a few words "I need to take a piss" and hurried to the door that was farthest from where the stairs to the upstairs was. Then, he relieved himself in his private company - in the dark, hoping there were no cameras above him.

Afterwards, Harry returned to which Ladislao switched with him, explaining that he also had to take a piss. Harry overlooked Imelda's sleeping body until Ladislao returned, the teenagers opening up their second can of food. They had quite a lot and from the bag Imelda picked up from Satin's side; they had enough to last them for a while.

Additionally, they were thinking of collecting Persephone's before heading downstairs to the next floor of horrors. Although, both Ladislao and Harry were contemplating staying on the second floor. When Imelda woke up, she admitted the second floor seemed more appealing than any other floors. They all understood what she meant. Complete darkness, hidden away, able to hunt without fear of being outnumbered. It was a godly arrangement.

Harry didn't think they could get any better.

"I think we should collect Persephone's bag and hide out here until the numbers of the dead tributes rise," she explains, "then we'll have

the best chance of survival."

"Waiting it out…" Harry felt complexed by the idea.

If they didn't do something, the Capitol would do something for them to make it more entertaining.

They're cruel like that.

Glancing up from his feet, he took a good look at the both of them. He explained his worries. "I know that the second floor is technically the best floor for our strategy, however. As we all know, the—" he points to the sky as if that explains everything, "isn't going to allow us to be here for long. It's a blessing we've been left alone for such a while now, without much immediate fighting we've had to do but… we're going to have to move knowing that if we don't, worse things are going to come for us."

"Like mutts," Ladislao whispers.

"Or tributes." Imelda adds, pulling a strand behind her ear.

The eldest of the group sighs, "I can understand what you mean, Harry. I still think we should grab Persephone's backpack, despite this. Then, we'll slowly venture down. Whatever Career or Careers that are upstairs are going to be brutal once we see them." After they came up with a simple outline of a goal they were heading to, Harry felt more relaxed but he still kept his guard up. That afternoon or night, however long they've been in the dark for, they headed over to where Persephone was laid. Imelda led the way with the candle she found and upon seeing her was disgusted. It was her blood they had stepped in, with her guts and intestines.

And it was definitely an axe wound that caused this. "7," they all said together.

"What a beast," Ladislao commented.

"A wild one," Imelda glared as she began to glance through the different items she had in her pack. "There are about seven different canned foods in here. If Ladislao takes three, you and I can have two each." Harry only agrees with this because out of the three of them, Ladislao was the one least advantage. Besides, they all had Satin's canned foods and bottles of water as well. It wasn't as if they were going to go hungry at any point soon.

However, Imelda also raked through her different weapons. “Fuck yeah,” she whispers, pulling out a thick knife. Ladislao grinned in earnest for her but all Harry was - was confused. Upon seeing his expression, she explained. “This is the type of knife we used for butchering back at home. If anything, I know how to wield this like it's an addition to my hand. *Yes*,” she hisses.

“Great,” Harry chirps.

“I suggest we head downstairs now.”

Neither of them disagreed with her so they took off and hid the candle behind a table leg for if they needed to come back up to the floor again. Ladislao, Harry, and Imelda took a look at the glowing floor. It was bright as shit with heaps of mirrors creating a maze beneath them. “I think I’m going to be sick,” Ladislao complained. “I only have one eye but it looks as if I’ve got seventy thousand. Shit,” he shook his head, unhappily.

“I mean,” Harry suggests, “all I meant was that we needed to move from the level. Upstairs could be a better bet then this if you feel up to it.”

“What is upstairs?” Ladislao asked them.

Imelda scratched her chin. “We don’t know. It looked as if nothing was wrong with the floor when we first arrived. Although,” they gave each other the look. “If anything, something bad is going to happen to the floor since we know the Capitol isn’t going to leave it alone, especially if we decide to go back.”

“And the deadly Careers upstairs.” Harry added.

Ladislao gave Harry a discouraged look. “Those deadly Careers were bickering like my siblings. Their barks are nothing but false shields. We literally saw Valor trip over himself. Pearl, choke on her food. Laurent, swear himself silly. Alistar, cry; and Susan punch the shit out of a mirror. Actually,” he glanced back down at the mirrors. “That was quite scary, *never mind*.”

“So?” Imelda rose her eyebrow at the two of them. “They’re by themselves whilst there are three of us. Please don’t tell me you guys are going to leave most of the work to me, now are you.”

Harry was confused. “What are you talking about?”

Ladislao pointed a finger at her. “Back when we were in primary school together she would have to do most of the school projects by herself because the rest of her classmates were lazy asses. My older friends told me about it.”

“Then, you can understand why I don’t want to do this by myself.”

“As if,” Harry snorted. “We don’t want to die so we are going to do this all together, y’know.”

“Alright then.” Ladislao concluded. “Together.”

“Together.”

Imelda rolled her eyes at the two of them, beginning to walk down the stairs. “You two are so sappy,” she grumbled. “You know, Potter. For someone so hot, you really are just at the end of the day, a teenage boy.”

“What is that supposed to mean?!”

Evans was in his hospital bed when Augustus arrived.

Eyeing the teenager as he took a seat beside him, Augustus glanced around his room. Neither said anything as on the big screen outside, the 74th Hunger Games was taking place. Augustus watched the screen from the large window, muttering to him. “That Potter boy,” he went over to the television in Evans’ room and turned it on. Augustus used his eyebrows to gesture to the screen where Evans was already staring at. “That Potter boy knows Tom.”

“What are you talking about, Aug?”

“Ever since Tom found out that he was reaped, he’s been completely obsessed with him.”

“Okay?” Evans shrugged his shoulders. “He always is. He likes winning.”

Augustus Nott bore his eyes at the screen, shaking his head. “No, I don’t believe that.” He pointed at the teenager who was beginning to head into the completely mirrored floor. “Not for him, at least.” Augustus opened his laptop and took a seat at the edge of his bed. Evans sighed, knowing he wasn’t going to get much further with

stopping Augustus than this.

“Tom has been completely obsessed with him since day one. He got hammered that night after the reaping and I think it’s the first time I’ve seen Tom that drunk since the first time we got him drunk; and he has been shitty with the rest of us ever since. He’s been MIA the last week. When you were injured, he seemed stressed which wasn’t something like him, and afterwards hasn’t visited once. But remember when Bella broke her arm last year, he visited her at least twice in the hospital but you, he hasn’t come back for you - has he?”

“So what?” Evans feels his body not feeling up to the task that was Augustus. “He’s hot.”

Augustus paused at his comment, “who?”

“Harry Potter; if Tom’s thirsting over him, let the damn teenager do so Aug.” Evans turned his attention to the roof and began to speak his mind. “The two of us have been attracted to him ever since he turned up in primary school, yes. But not once has he decided to take the initiative and act like one of us. Or the girls. Or any of the adults who have preyed on him since he was young. Tom’s never liked anyone but,” he gestures his hand to the screen. “This District 12 scrawny—“

“Scrawny?” Evans blinked. “I’m apologise - but am I missing something here; he’s *not* scrawny.”

“Yes but what I’m trying to say is—“

“Aug, Harry is like perfect for Tom.” Augustus gestures for him to continue. Evans decides to entertain him with his thoughts. “He’s District. We’re both Capitol. Tom’s Capitol. Tom’s had everything he’s ever wanted. Harry’s exquisite; he’s District. The look that he has isn’t found anywhere else in the Capitol. I think the closest person who looks like him is Lady March. She has dark curls, deep green eyes, and his inherited features. Although, she’s fair skinned unlike him,” Harry was very tanned, “and is a male.”

Augustus looks as if he’s about to shout and break everything in his room. “Yes, but we’re also men too!”

“Sexuality is a scale, Aug.”

“Tom hasn’t been dicked down by anyone,” he points at him as if that wasn’t an atrocious comment to make, but what he said next was true at least. “We agreed back at Lestranges’ sleepover that unless Tom is

clearly straight; dating women willingly, it would be either of us who had to have sex with him first." Augustus laid back on his bed, covering his eyes. "But no, he seems to want to be a virgin until the first unique bug of the land pops his cherry, no?"

Evans can understand what Augustus means. It was unfair. But they were talking about Tom Riddle. The President's successor. Tom could break or make them. Both of them were as obsessed as him as they were with power, and being the husband to the strongest man in the country was as appealing as being with him. His strong cheekbones, his fair complexion, his luscious eyelashes, his golden brown eyes, his wavy hair that made mouths water, everything; everything about Tom was as drooling-dropping as the next thing.

Girls cried for him. So did boys, nobody was safe.

For years, Tom has been rejecting the advances of both women and men. For a good while, the two of them thought that Tom was asexual. Not wanting to have sex or date anyone. He seemed to put love on the same scale as school; unimportant. Unnecessary. A means to an end, although, nobody has ever gotten past the making out stage with him.

There was one girl back when they were fifteen who Tom did kiss; Sloane Lydig Robbins but she was very particular with what she told people despite there being a group of people there at the party, they made out at. That Tom was extremely nervous and that it was the best time Sloane has ever had at a party. That when Augustus and Evans begged for more details, she said his tongue was incredible, if a little hesitant, and that he sucked on her neck viciously like a vampire. Jane, her friend, said that Tom looked extremely out of it and emotional afterwards but nothing 'turned on' as such. Just that he was overwhelmed and left Sloane there giddy.

Still, that didn't make Augustus and Evans sure he wasn't gay, just—questioning.

Until Augustus decided to declare this Harry Potter was the one to get into his pants.

"Okay," Evans opened his arms. "Show me the facts."

"You didn't see the interview in-person. Tom was a mess. His eyes were red, his nose was red, he looked as if he was about to catch a cold, and was entirely out of it. His hair wasn't tidy and that's never something that has happened before; Tom loves his hair, and he

smelled of cigarettes. He also drank like an alcoholic but when Harry walked on stage, capturing the audience with his personality, Tom's face changed. It looked somewhat put together as if Harry farted rainbows and unicorns out of his ass." Evans chuckled at the description before eyeing Augustus surprisingly.

He licked his dry lips. "Of course, Harry would've changed his expression - I bet he changed yours."

"What are you talking about?"

Evans grabbed his remote and switched it back to the replay of the interviews. Then, he forwarded it to where Harry walked onto the screen. Evans pointed to him. "That teenager made everyone clap ten times louder without even being spoken to. His stage presence is powerful. Even looking at Barty's expression, he looked surprised and bewildered and we both know Barty doesn't just look at people like that. Also, he looked atrocious. The fuck?"

Augustus rolled his eyes. "So what you're saying is that Tom's reaction was nothing but being attracted to *him*."

"Perhaps, if what you're saying is true and they are closer than people suspect - god knows how - then so what? That's our President. Tom is allowed to be attracted to whoever he wants. As much as that breaks my heart, if that's what he's comforted by, then I guess we're out of luck, Aug." But Augustus didn't look as if he was about to call it quits, not yet. Evans sighed, shrugging his shoulders. He knew the most he was going to get with Tom anyway was a friendship connection. He would sob about it later when he felt sorry for himself. "I'm not going to try and help you with whatever plan you think is going to get Tom to fall madly in-love with you."

The teenager glares at him before pointing to the screen. "He's a tribute, Evans. If he dies, then Tom's open for either of us again."

Evans coughs at the profound statement. "*No*."

"What do you mean, no? He's District, he's beneath us."

"Tom would hate you forever, would you rather exchange that for this random boy's death?"

"I wouldn't if I knew I wouldn't get caught."

"Nott," Evans shook his head. "I'll tell him."

“Who?—*Tom.*”

“I will if it means Harry will be safe.”

“Don’t you hate him—“ he points to the screen. “He literally took Tom away from *us*.”

Evans shrugged, “it’s not as if I’ve done much to keep Tom here. Look at me. Look at you. We’re both scheming how to get his affections whilst he’s in the arena with his attention regardless.” Evans touches the button that alerts the hospital staff that he wants something. “We have done everything and he,” he says directed at the screen to Harry, “has done nothing. He’s mesmerising. Tom adores him. If Harry decides to do anything about his relationship with Tom, we’re nothing in-comparison. Augustus. Everyone wants Tom. It’s not as if we’re missing out. Let it go.”

“But—“

“No, stop. It’s not Harry’s fault. It’s Tom’s.”

“But how—“

“I know,” he sniffles, tears forming at the corners of his eyes regardless of how much he’d rather them not. “It’s unfair, but it’s not as if we’re District. It’s not as if we’re trapped. You can go date Sir Vanderbilt like you’ve always wanted to. He’s extremely attractive. I can go date Lady Wetmore. We’ll both be happy, even if we cannot date Tom. Tom’s not the end of the world.”

Augustus went silent.

“I’m going to talk to Tom.”

“What?”

“Confess my feelings, at least then I’ll have an answer.”

Evans shrugged his shoulders pitifully, “I shouldn’t have kissed him. I blew my chance entirely.”

“You were both drugged up, it’s no one’s fault really.”

Neither said anything else. Augustus sat up from the bed and took his leave. Evans wiped the tears from the corners of his eyes, wondering why the world was truly unfair. It shouldn’t be like this. It shouldn’t be murdered by some random District kid who happened to be reaped

one random year. Evans cried; and he didn't want to stop.

Augustus trudged through the hospital and back down the stairs to where he made his leave. For the past day and a half, nobody has been able to find Tom. He's been missing. Utterly gone, not to the point where the President has said anything about it, but missing to where none of them know where he is. Augustus didn't find that concerning. What he did find concerning was how much of this was an impact due to Harry Potter. If Evans said it was right, then he also could agree that Potter was attractive and something to swoon over but he didn't. He thought he was something of a fly on the wall, bothersome. Wouldn't go away, no matter how many times he tried to hit it. Augustus kept trudging through the city to the most reasonable place he thought Tom would be in. Lady Swan Welles.

Standing before her apartment's door, he knocked. When she opened the door, Francisca blinked like a deer caught in the headlights at him. "Hello, Mr. Nott?—what do I owe the pleasure?"

"I was wondering if you could tell me if Tom was here, I know you're his stylist."

Francisca sighed, "no. I haven't seen him since the interviews. Why?"

"He's just missing; he hasn't been answering anyone's phone. I thought you happened to know where he was - was all." Augustus answered honestly. Francisca glanced inside to where he wasn't able to see but Augustus bet Tom was inside. She turned back to him, violet eyes on him. Francisca hummed, "well. It's unfortunate I don't know where he is. I would tell you dear if I did know. I think he might be trying to bet for an sponsorship for his boy, Harry, though."

"Harry?" Augustus felt himself go cold. "Like the District 12 tribute?"

"Yes," she cooes. "He's very keen on seeing him win. It would be troublesome if anything besides the boy winning would've happened to him. If I do see him, I will pass the message along to him that you're looking for him."

Augustus thanked her and left.

Francisca shut the door behind him and the first thought Augustus had was: she's a terrific liar.

Practically smashing her head against the door, Francisca glanced over to where Tom was sitting on the couch, distraught. He was watching

the interaction after he heard whose name came out of her mouth and it was the first time in hours he peeled his eyes away from the television screen. She sighed, heading over to Tom and sitting beside him - pulling the white doona over the top of her legs. She told him, “he wanted to see you. I thought it was best not to.”

“Pun included?”

Francisca grinned at his humour. “No, but entirely allowed.”

Tom looked as if he hadn’t slept since the games started which was quite plausible. The bags underneath his eyes were massive, his eyes were red along with his cheeks, everything about his face was puffy—Tom was even having a few breakouts Francisca was managing, which she thinks is due to stress but Tom hasn’t gotten up from the couch since the games started so… he hasn’t seen himself. His hair was a complete mess despite her trying to comb it every day, and his poor lips were puffy due to him biting them so often. It was horrible! She kissed his forehead comfortingly, touching his sides. “I’ve contacted Mr. Wysong about your request. He said he was willing to hear it as long as there was a deal about the fundings for the Suydam Hospital on the eastern side of the Capitol. What do you think?”

“I think it would be the best for him.” Tom admits. “Whatever medicine he needs will be sent immediately, I want him to be prepared if he gets hurt.”

Francisca pulls an arm around Tom, and Tom leans into his shoulder without much of a complaint. He seemed so depressed, not even antidepressants were working. It was times like this where Francisca was confronted with the thought that Tom was still a child. He was only seventeen. He wasn’t eighteen until December. Perhaps if Harry wins he’ll be able to see Tom for his Victory Tour but Francisca wasn’t so sure. Not with the way Tom was acting as if death hit his front door—or hers’ but still. Harry seemed to have a good chance at winning!

The Career pack wasn’t even like a usual Career’s pack. It was made up of District 2’s girl, District 4’s boy, and surprisingly District 11’s girl. She made some sort of deal with District 4’s boy early on to work together so she was now a part of this abnormal pack. The other’s; District 4’s girl was still on the first floor, District 1’s boy—she thinks his name is Alistar or something—is on the fourth floor slowly moving downward, and District 2’s boy was on the third floor.

Harry was with District 10’s girl and boy; Imelda and Ladislao, she

found out their names from Tom who said Harry became friends with them during their training sessions - and she thought they were excellent companions to have. District 10, livestock, meant that they were able to wield knives and things, she thought, although would admit she didn't know a lot about the Districts besides their industries. Francisca told Tom plenty of times that they would take care of each other, but he wasn't having it.

"That girl left him alone," he hissed emotionally, livid. "I'll kill her."

"If anything, Harry will. He didn't seem to be happy about her leaving him."

"I don't want him to be around them."

"Don't you worry, Tom. Karma comes to those most deserving of it."

Francisca could see that Tom had a bleeding heart when it came to his boy, despite her words. That he wanted to believe her but couldn't. That he couldn't believe anyone besides his escape from the arena. Francisca hated this look on Tom. The powerless, defeated, weak expressions on his face. She wanted him to be happy. *What were the games if not to make people happy? But Tom wasn't. He had a haunted look on his face; almost as if Harry was to die, he was going to follow. She found herself liking the hunger games less, only watching because she didn't want to miss out on anything. For him, and for herself.*

Unable to sit still for any longer, she said she was going to do something about all of this.

Heading to her room and dressing up in purple like she usually did, she put her business high-heels on and did a serious makeup look. She needed a particular someone to know she meant business. Francisca couldn't have her little Tom sad like this forever. No matter how helpless he felt about this situation he couldn't change. Kissing Tom's forehead and bidding him a goodbye, she was going to return by night. Just so that Tom was fed but then lurked out of the apartment, searching for more people to impress. Flaunt. Showcase her skills too.

Just like a vampire who wanted blood, she creeped up to her first victim who was already drinking. Perfect, she thought to herself. Sitting besides the man, she glared at him viciously underneath her purple eyelashes. "Mr. Lupin, how are you today?"

"Lady Swan Welles?—what—what are you doing here?"

“I’m here to make business with you.”

“What type of business,” he hissed like a wolf as if he was prey.

“I was wondering if you’d like a lifetime supply of alcohol. Nothing you would have to pay for anymore and only of the best liquor in the country. The stuff that makes you become sick.” She adds on, knowing he liked to feel pitiful.

Remus didn’t look overly pleased by her company. “You didn’t answer my question. What business?”

“I was wondering if you’d assist me in helping Mr. Potter win, that would be amazing.”

The man appeared taken aback. “*Potter*?”

Francisca rose an eyebrow at him. “Yes, who else did you think I meant?”

“I—like *James Potter*?”

She did not know that man but if anything suspected it could’ve sounded like potentially Harry’s father’s name, however, she didn’t know. He seemed royally taken aback though so she let him collect himself. Francisca corrected him. “No, Harry Potter. From District 12? —this year’s male tribute? I have a bone to pick with you really because my dearest child is sobbing over him and his possibility of dying. I’m not willing to allow it to happen so if you could please sober up and help me help him, that would be great.”

“This entire time…” Remus appeared amazed and horrified.

“What?” She glared at him. “Speak up.”

Remus stutters, nervous all of a sudden. “This entire time… I thought you Capitol folk have been saying Henry Porter. Due to your heavy accents; and my inability to say conscious.” Francisca was flabbergasted. She practically screamed her disbelief, “what?!”

“Shush,” Remus hushed her.

“What do you mean, *shush*, you didn’t realise Harry Potter was our tribute?”

“I thought Sedge’s name was Ledge for the longest time until I realised you guys were pronouncing the S like a L. It’s weird,” the man looks

as if he's about to vomit. Francisca knowing the look after having to hold up Tom's hair for the past couple of days. "You also pronounce your vowels like R's." Remus fell off the barstool he was on and began to vomit near her feet.

"Ugh!" She glared down at him. "Can one of you gentlemen please help?"

The Avoxes came over to help clean up the mess the victor was causing himself.

Francisca had to hold her nose to ignore the putrid smell of acids Remus was leaking all over the place. Picking up the man by the nape as if he was a small kitten in need of its mother, she dragged him out of the bar. Additionally, she took him outside to the gardens where he was best to get some fresh air. "Breathe," she demanded him. "It's fresh air."

The children were watching them as the man breathed heavily, trying to catch his breath as if he's been underwater for the past twenty years. Francisca grabbed his collar and pulled it close to her face. "I told you. Harry Potter. Know him or know him not, I want him alive. I'm sure you do too. Sedge is dead. He's all you have left this year. So —make this deal with me. A lifetime supply of alcohol for such a pathetic man like yourself and help me save him. Or else, you'll be left with him dead and no alcohol."

"Alright, alright—" he coughed, wheezing. "I understand."

"Alright, pathetic man."

"Harsh, much?"

"Accurate."

Harry, Imelda, and Ladislao were scared shitless when a hologram jumped in front of them. "*Due to the high demand, this was more preferred for announcing the Deaths of the 74th Hunger Games. Day 1.*" Deciding to take a seat, the three of them leant up against the shards of mirrors as the faces of their companions flashed onto the screen. From District 1, Persephone Ryde.

From District 5, Royce.

From District 6, the boy tribute.

From District 7, Sequoia.

From District 8, Satin and Hannah.

From District 9, both female and male tributes.

However, that was only eight faces. There were ten dead. The announcer returned. “Day 2.”

District 5, Romilda.

And from District 12—

Harry clenched his eyebrows when he saw her face.

Imelda patted his shoulder comfortingly as Ladislao spoke up. “Fourteen left.”

Opening his eyes, despite the pain, he looked at Ladislao. “Yes, fourteen. Eleven, excluding us. Alistar, debatably upstairs. Susan—somewhere. Valor, debatably upstairs. Silver—somewhere. Lux—hidden. Pearl—downstairs, maybe. Laurent—somewhere. District 6’s girl was not on the list. I reckon she got away. Ground floor for sure. 7 is downstairs. We’re here. Rex, you’d think would be downstairs since he got away; he wouldn’t kill someone unless they were threatening his life. Malia, who knows with her. She’s a little devil. And Sedge is dead…”

“Think,” Ladislao smiles sadly. “One of us is closer to home.”

Harry glared at him. “I want all of us to go home.”

Looking up, Imelda and Harry both locked eyes. If anyone was going home out of the three of them, it was Ladislao. Harry would be content with the decision if he didn’t know he was leaving Tom behind but if anyone deserved to go home, it was him.

Unable to sit down any longer, he tilted his head to the maze of mirrors. “Let’s continue.”

Holding out their hands, they began to feel through the maze so they wouldn’t run into any walls—ignoring the way the glass cut their hands as they got further through the maze. It was becoming a chore for Ladislao, the teenager unable to function properly anymore so Imelda picked him up and told him to close his eyes. Harry kept

making sure they were turning without bumping into any glass walls as they saw millions of reflections of themselves. Even the roof was a mirror. It was nauseating, and they were all feeling the toll of being in the mirror floor.

Decidedly, Imelda put Ladislao down and told Harry to go to sleep; that she would be on night-watch. Trusting her, he fell asleep on her shoulder alongside Ladislao. It was becoming exhausting keeping up with the bright lights but Imelda pulled her jacket over both their heads so they were able to get a good night's sleep. At one point, she began to rub his back to soothe him which he found was nice. *When was the last time a girl held him like this?*

Perhaps Ginny. She hugged him tightly and cupped his cheeks demanding him, ordering him, to survive. No matter what he thought, no matter who else seemed worthy of saving; or living more than him. Harry bit his inner-cheek whilst thinking about her.

If the numbers got slimmer, they would have to split up.

There was no way he wasn't going to volunteer his death if it was him, Imelda, and Ladislao at the end of the road. And subconsciously, he thinks Imelda knows that too. She seemed borderline infatuated with Ladislao as much as Tom was with him, and that spoke weight.

It was heartbreaking.

When Harry woke up next, Ladislao was keeping watch whilst Imelda was entangled between the two of them. She was lying face-first to the floor, hair out and hiding her face from the bright lights. Her backside was to the air, Harry averted his gaze only happening to notice it since she was half-sprawled out onto his lap; but was glad Ladislao put his jacket onto her so he couldn't see anything, really. He flushed, turning to him who was cheekily staring at him with a knowing look. "Oh my fucking—just spit it out."

"Do you like her?"

"Ladis," he shakes his head. "No—I have *like* five beaus at home. I'm quite content, thank you."

"Make it six, then?"

Harry gasped, mouth wide, staring at him as if he didn't just say that. "You are so shameless. And you're not even drunk. I swear, I've heard some shameless things but that happens to be top of my list." He

admits, becoming more jokingly. “Unfortunately,” he narrows his gaze. “I’m more into the lads, if you get what I mean?” Harry winks at him.

Ladislao blushed instantaneously at his comment.

Harry bursting out laughing. “My revenge arc.”

“I’m putting that at the top of the most shameless comments I’ve ever heard,” Ladislao declares.

“Please do, I’ll be happy to take the top spot.” He winks.

Harry stroked Imelda’s hair and she unconsciously came searching for the warmth of his hand as she leaned into his side. Ladislao watched with interest. Not knowing if he’d get another chance to tell him, he opens his mouth. “Whether like a sister, or a lover—Imelda adores you.” At the affectionate words, Ladislao flushes. “She went searching for you more than me; she couldn’t care about me, I know. She cares more for you which you should consider. I’d reckon she’d do anything for you.” She hums underneath her breath. “She might see me as attractive but you definitely have her heart. Not that I’m offended,” he winks. “I’ve got my main beau after all.”

“You were very promiscuous in your interview,” Ladislao explains. “Who is your beau?”

“A wonderful person who has my entire heart; I hope he lives on without me if I cease to exist.”

Ladislao frowns, “that’s really sad.”

Harry laughs without feeling the humour. “Ten of us are already dead, it’s now our odds. One out of fourteen. They’re not much better than what we originally had. Only one career is dead. Outlier one, Silver, is still alive. Outlier two, 7, is still alive. Outliers’ three and four are still alive. Outlier five, Rex, is still alive. And I’ll put in, outlier six; Malia, is still alive because the little girl frightens me to death.”

“When you said outlier three and four, you meant us, didn’t you?”

“Of course; sleep with your enemy, not your friend.”

“Is that a saying?”

Harry shrugs his shoulders. “I’ve found that in life, your enemies are

usually the people who will like you the most - even if they hate you. Hate and love correlate, you know. My beau and I… well," knowing he was talking about Tom made this all worse. He wanted to cry but knew he shouldn't. He wasn't safe to. "One might say we should be enemies. And we are our greatest enemy and ally. I think it's why we work so well together. I just hope that if I die, he won't be too caught up on me is all."

"Harry," Ladislao shakes his head. "Anyone would be caught up on you."

"Thanks, Ladis. I think the same can be said about you though."

"Me?"

"Yes, I'd never forget you if you died."

Ladislao fell silent. His voice was a whisper.

"Thank you, Harry."

Chapter End Notes

can't be fucked to write out a whole thing so yeah
got to love foreshadowing
people, we've hit 1000 hits!! and a bit more! Thank you so much for reading this
the subscriptions and kudos are just, thank you
I like that you like the story so far
Until Sunday :)
Up next, "peace"

Note: It's Day 2 but relaying the deaths from the previous day

P S

cowboy like me

Chapter Notes

Posted: 25th of February, 2024

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They were on the move when Imelda woke up.

Ladislao and Harry kept their conversation to themselves as they walked through the mirror maze. As they moved further into the maze, they froze upon seeing blood and distant screams. Fighting, they all knew - Imelda holding onto Harry's shoulder as he peaked over the corner to see what was happening. Imelda held Ladislao back behind her to protect him. Harry and Imelda watched the scene of two female fighters, warriors going at it as they detected 7 and Pearl from District 4 to be the source of the battle.

Imelda whispered. "Did they pass us or were they already before us?"

Harry stopped a shiver that jolted his system. "I have no clue, before perhaps?"

7's entire face was covered in blood as she began to chase Pearl who was heading in the opposite direction to were the three of them where. Imelda nudged Harry, "should we follow them?" He gulped; 7 was injured, he was sure they together could take her on, and Pearl was bleeding out. Decision made, he raced after them - the blood helping Harry not run into a wall.

Making sure he was on the tips of his toes, he followed the screams and heavy panting as the blood was splattered up against the wall as if Pearl ran into it. The trio found themselves at the edge of a staircase when they heard the shrieks of a woman; Pearl, they suspected. Blood trickled down the set of stairs and Harry thought it was mostly Pearl's until he saw the state that 7 was in. Ducking his head so it was underneath the set of stairs - he watched the scene occur:

"We don't need no weak link." Susan declared, she cut Pearl's throat with her knife.

Malia stood there with her knife out, ready to fight who attacked Pearl.

Laurent watched the scene with tears in his eyes.

Holding Pearl in his arms, she died.

A cannon signified her death.

Then 7 followed suit.

With her axe swinging; Imelda, Harry, and Ladislao all watched the awaited bloodbath happen. The occurrence the audience must've wanted to see at the beginning. Except, with the outlier going berserk. 7 didn't seem conscious of her movements, only swinging despite her back and chest stabbed into multiple times by Pearl. Despite that, she was still strong. "You die." She repeated it over and over again.

Susan stepped back and threw a knife at her. Malia ran close, dodging her axe and slicing her Achilles tendon. 7 screamed but didn't stop fighting. She stumbled and stabbed Malia across the chest. She was about to continue murdering the thirteen year-old girl but she turned her eyes back onto Susan and Laurent who bore their weapons. Malia screamed, Ladislao shaking beside Harry. "Should we go help them?"

Imelda glared at her district partner, "that's our competition, stupid."

Laurent ran forward and chuck a few of his throwing stars at her. All of them miss, except for one that takes 7's left ear. She hisses in pain but continues running forward. She swung her axe and sliced one side from Laurent's face completely, taking his eye completely. Ladislao whimpered beside Harry and he grabbed his hand, holding it tightly. Laurent was kicked back into Susan who was out of breath. 7 panted heavily. She wielded her axe again, and began to move to chop Susan's head in half but Susan threw a small knife into her jugular area where she stopped.

"You bitch," Susan hissed. "You deserve to die."

"Nobody deserves to die," Harry murmured, only Dumbledore.

He didn't need to say anything for the two others to receive the true meaning behind his words.

7 ran forward, one hand on her jugular, the other dragging Susan and breaking her fingers. Imelda whispered, "how is she still able to fight? —fuck, she's terrifying. I almost want to hand the title as victor to 7 because she's so badass." The two boys agree with her. She was terrifying and dedicated. Harry leant his chin against the freezing

ground.

7 began to smash Susan's head up against the wall; before Susan changed the tide of the fight, kicking her stomach as she went flying back. Whilst she was on her back, 7's eyes went to the back of her head and the trio froze as they flashed onto the three of them. "Fuck, fuck—" Ladislao murmured. Although, Susan didn't notice them as 7 sat up and went to stab Susan with her small knife. Susan's hand was stabbed through as 7 got her, Susan twisting the knife she had around 7's stomach who screamed in pain. Both let go as 7 ran off outside.

The trio froze. "How are none of them dead?"

No cannons went off.

Susan fell to the ground, eyes shutting as she tried to recuperate from the pain.

The trio stood up from where they were laying on the ground, Harry turned to the two others. "I reckon our best bet of survival is the second floor where we met you, Ladis. We're able to fight and ambush our unfortunate victims that way and win. Trust me, we need to get out of here." He points downstairs. "I'm one hundred percent sure those three are dead; and Susan might have the sole chance of surviving but with her condition, I won't be too sure she'll be able to fight well. Mutilated as she was."

"Agreed," Imelda turns to head back into the mirror maze.

Harry talks as they walk. "Rex is one hundred percent outside. 7, we know is outside. That girl from six has to be outside. Maybe even Lux," Harry speculated. "Alistar, Valor, Silver; are all above us. Malia, Laurent, and 7 are as good as dead. I reckon Susan will end Malia and Laurent's lives just as she did Pearl's. Don't need to add torment to her guilt as well."

"Man, you sure like to talk a lot." Imelda complains. "I hate this. I really do."

"It means we're the only alliance alive."

Harry nods his head at Ladislao's comment. "Soon to be fourteen dead."

"Ten alive," Ladislao adds. "We are three."

All their eyes both light up and dim; “that means our odds of surviving are one out of seven.”

It also meant they would have to split up soon enough, but Malia, Laurent, and 7 weren’t dead yet. It was still eleven dead, thirteen alive. They just had to wait. It took as much time getting out of the maze as it did getting through the maze in the first place. Harry used this time to discuss the game plans with the other two. “We at least have a fine idea of who is above us. Alistar, Silver, and Valor. Who do you think would’ve been at the top level?”

Imelda was more concentrated on trying to find their way out of the mirror maze whilst Ladislao listened to his hypotheticals, “Alistar - most likely. Silver would’ve stayed there and wouldn’t have attacked, knowing how fragile his mental state is. Alistar would’ve decimated everyone; not knowing at first what was happening and slowly making his way down.”

“A final boss man?” Harry snickers.

“Maybe,” Laurent debates. “However, it does mean that Alistar is actively searching for tributes so he doesn’t miss any which is quite a pain - what do you think?”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Certainly a pain.”

“Although, three against one.”

Imelda turns around to the two of them. They give her a childish apologetic expression as she seems mad. However, her next statement was on the contrary. “I don’t think Valor and Alistar have met up.” She tells them. Harry asks what makes her think that. She shrugs her shoulders and continues to guide them through the maze. At least they were going quicker than last time due to muscle memory. “I’m not too sure; I just feel as if Silver would be dead if they were teamed up together. I also do think that if I was Valor, I would want to try and find his District partner, Susan before making any of the big decisions. He doesn’t seem very competent.”

Harry holds a finger to his chin, thinking. “D’you reckon if Susan wakes up she’ll be hoping for him?”

“I wouldn’t.” Imelda says, “I don’t think she would. Not if we’ve killed him first.”

The trio continued to make a strong effort to get as far as they could

before they decided to settle down for a break. Imelda apparently needed to piss and didn't get up from where she sat. Harry rose an eyebrow at her and Ladislao told him to move if he didn't want to get wet. Then, he noticed that she began to piss right then and there. Standing up immediately, he laughed as if it was one of the funniest things ever and Imelda had a small smile erupting onto her face as well. Struggling, deciding why the fuck not; it's not as if his reputation can get any worse, he pissed in his underwear as well. Imelda broke out into a harsher and more free laugh as she watched his pants become saturated. Ladislao sighed, "alright. Can't be the only one not to, can I?"

And then, he pissed his pants.

The three of them were all wet in their own piss as Harry sat down and opened up his backpack. It took a while for the three of them to calm down from their laughing session before stating, "there are worse things to life than pissing on national television I find."

"Mhm," Imelda agrees - opening up her canned fruit. "Oh, look at this."

"Is that… pineapples?" Harry questioned, remembering the fruit from the dinner table.

"Must be," she offers them a piece each.

Deciding to share, the group all open one meal each and distribute them depending on what they wanted to eat. Ladislao opened his tuna can and Harry took a piece of the tuna. Harry also ate some of his corn, the group laughing over the fact they were eating and sitting in their own piss. Imelda jokes, "imagine coming around the corner and all you smell is piss and see our yellow shit." Harry snorted, not something he did usually but it meant he found it seriously dead funny.

"Our secret weapon," Ladislao began. "The poisonous piss. Ahh!"

Again, the cycle of laughter kept happening between the three of them. Harry had to hold his chest because he felt like it was making him choke on the inside. Drinking what was left of his first water bottle, the group saluted the bottles of water as if it was alcohol they were sharing around the dinner table; or bar; or in some other universe, a club. Harry wished they were anywhere else but the Hunger Games but sometimes the universe was cruel.

Unfortunately, unbiasedly cruel; preys upon its victims as life itself. Food for violence, war. Life.

They were the product of living.

The dead were dead; they escaped.

They were still incarcerated — stuck — trapped in the endless cycle of war until someone plunged a knife into their hearts. Poisoned their foods. Trapped their souls. Kissed them to death. Absolutely ruined them back and forth; they were the living. Young and old. Babies in comparison. Just learning how to live when this has been taken away from them. Their right to choose. Their right, ability to fight. This was their life. They had to accept it.

Harry wanted to destroy the Earth for all its glory, revenge and justice.

It might be sad to be the last person left alive but everyone would be done justice.

Sitting here, talking to Imelda and Ladislao as if they'd been his best friends for the past ten years - he feels as if this was unfair. Too unfair. They could've met somewhere else. It was a thought that ruined Harry, inside ever so slightly. If he was going to survive, cruelly, punished; he was going to murder President Dumbledore. His head decapitated; body destroyed; victims avenged. It would be Harry's personal mission. Personal goal.

If Imelda and Ladislao had to die — if the rest of the twenty-one tributes had to die; he would make it his personal mission to make sure it was the last of them. No more. No more hunger games. Whether Tom takes over as President, or Harry kills him; one way it had to stop. No more tears to be shed, not this way at least. No more children to cry for.

No more to add to the list at least.

Moments like these, shouldn't cut so deep into Harry's soul; no kid's soul.

Not anymore.

They get up and leave the empty cans behind them amongst their piss. From Harry's understanding, it was getting closer to night since the sun was up fully when they were taking a peak downstairs. Still, no

cannons went off to alert them of Malia's, Laurent's, or 7's deaths. Internally, Harry mourned the teenagers but he accepted their deaths like he would with any other's. Finally, when they found the stairs to the second floor they were beyond exhausted. Imelda, grasping the candle that was behind the table leg, tilted her head towards the door where they were about to exit from. But then—

Harry's eyes went wide. "Imelda! Duck!"

Grabbing his long knife, Harry threw it at the person who was running towards Imelda. Slashing the tribute's — Valor's side, Imelda had enough time to throw the candle at him; not needing it and grabbing out her knife from her pants. The tribute from 2 wasn't going to make this easy for them so whilst Valor was distracted with Imelda and Ladislao, Harry ran forward; dodged his attack and yanked — which took out a good portion of his bones from his ribcage — his knife out from his stomach. As Harry was stepping back, he got hit on his shoulder but it was only by a small knife Valor had on him. He hissed but dodged the next one.

Imelda ran forward, Valor's knife attaching to hers as they tried to put the most pressure on their own hilts; Harry ran and sliced Valor's back viciously, dodging the knife that swung at him, and using his own knife to deflect Valor's. Imelda got stabbed on the arm as Valor began to try and retreat. "Why—" Valor panted, Harry seeing the distressed expression on his face, "why wasn't this year normal like last?—why split up—wh-why?"

Ladislao runs forward, "so us outliers can win!"

And Ladislao throws a knife directly in Valor's chest.

Harry blinked and the sound of a cannon resonated within his soul. His first kill.

Hissing, taking a look at the wound on his shoulder, it was deep.

Ladislao began to look between the two teenagers as they slumped to the ground in agony. "What—what do you guys need?"

"Preferably gauze, stitches, and a bandage but I think a bandage will suffice, thanks Ladislao." Harry joked, but tears were wielding in his eyes. Imelda decided to scoot over towards him, leaning against the wall like he was; Harry asked, "let me check out your wound. I'm usually good at this stuff."

“What aren’t you good at?” Imelda sneezed. “It seems like that’s the question everyone needs to ask; not your strengths.”

“Not saving people?” Harry rose his eyebrow, but his face made an atrocious expression when turning to look at Valor. “I mean—when I’m not in the Hunger Games; I feel like that’s a foreign concept here. Fuck,” his shoulder hurt. Ladislao handed him the bandages and a water bottle. Nodding his head at what he had to work with, he gestures his head at Valor’s pack. “Ladis, check out if there’s anything in Valor’s pack we can use.”

Harry told Imelda to show him her arm and it was bad. Not deep but the small nerve linings would be making her — like how she was now. He examined the wound. “Alright, you’re not going to die.” He tells her, “but from now on, no more wielding with this arm. We don’t want you to lose circulation in this arm. It’s your right arm right, your dominant arm?”

“Yes,” she hisses. “I’m not going to bleed out, am I?”

“If I do a good job, no.”

“Right, bloody do a good job then.”

Then, Harry began to bandage Imelda’s arm from her hand—making it so that she had a pocket for all her four fingers and one for her thumb, before he started to tightly wrap the arm. Blood soaked the bandage immediately but at least if pressure was kept there, she wouldn’t bleed out; Harry wouldn’t have thought. He felt lightheaded as he assisted with tightening it around her elbow. “There,” he tried to pull it up with one of his fingers. “Secure.”

There was leftover bandage, so Harry cut it and put it inside of the makeshift cast so there was more pressure to let the wound leave over. However, there was none left for Harry. He kept his hand on his shoulder, leaning back against the cold wall. Taking off his jacket he let the feisty wound cool against the concrete. He moaned in pain.

“Fuck yeah,” Ladislao shouted. “I found gauze and another bandage roll!”

Opening his eyes in surprise, the teenager hurried over to Harry and passed the gauze and roll to him. “Thank fuck,” he groaned. “Hey Ladislao, can you help me take my jacket off.” The boy helped roll back the jacket before helping Harry take it off completely. It laid on the ground as Ladislao took a seat beside Harry. Imelda leant up

against his other shoulder, completely plastered. “From the looks of Imelda’s wound, it looked like a clean cut, but this.” He cringed. It still had the knife inside of the wound. He was scared that if he took it out, he would bleed out due to the artery there. “You’re going to have to help me.”

“What do you mean help with, Harry?”

“I need you to lather me up with gauze.” He sniffled. “I’m going to rip out the knife. I have to rip out the knife. I won’t allow you to since afterwards, I’m going to be spasmodically unable to. You’ll lather me up in the gauze and immediately start to tightly, like constricting me, wrap the bandage around my shoulder. First underneath my armpit, then to my back—doing the same thing, but this time going over the back of my arm, covering the wound. Can you do that, Ladis?”

“Of course I can.”

“Head back, I don’t want to accidentally stab you.”

And so Ladislao did - putting his head back so that Harry wouldn’t be able to get close enough to accidentally stab him. Using his left hand to grab the hilt of the knife, he paused. Grabbing his knife that has some of Valor’s blood on it, he put the handle into his mouth, biting down on it. Also noticing that its sharp side was pointed at Imelda's head, seriously close, he pushed Imelda over so that she wouldn’t get accidentally stabbed either. “Alright,” he said through the knife’s handle. Although, Harry thought it must’ve sound rather like “Arrit.”

Grabbing the knife’s hilt, he screamed. Tears filling the crevices of his eyes, he sobbed as he yanked the knife out of place and out of his shoulder. He felt like it was lodged between the joint between his shoulder and the bone of his arm. “Fuck!” He screamed, knife in his mouth falling to his lap. He was fucked.

He turned to Ladislao, shaking and unable to control his body spasmodically spamming. “Now!”

Ladislao poured the gauze into his shoulder where blood was pouring out of his shoulder. He sobbed, unable to move as Ladislao layered the gauze into his wound. Then once he was all out of gauze, began to wrap the bandage around in the pattern he told him to rapidly. Harry watched the process as if he was an outsider. Teaching Ginny or Abele or Sibyl how to do what he could do. People called him a miracle worker back at home.

By the time the bandage was all secured, Harry hiccuped in agony. “Oh god.”

“What does god mean?” Ladislao asked.

“A-a a deity. Outer-worldly, utterly powerful. A ruler.”

Harry forgot a lot of the districts didn’t have a clue about god, or gods, or any religious themes. President Dumbledore made sure to get rid of them so they had no one to hope for. Harry slumped his head up against the wall. He cried and cried, “f-fuck.”

“What can I do to help?”

“I don’t know, dance, get sponsors?” Harry laughed sarcastically along with his tears. “I’m not going to be able to do much now. My right arm is my good arm.” He glared at the camera. “If I’ve royally fucked the joint then I won’t be able to do much with this hand. Ugh,” thinking about doing everything in reverse seemed to be a big hassle. No one wanted to relearn everything with their less dominant hand. “Lets hope I either die so I don’t have to worry about this or win quickly so I can get the A+ medical care the Capitol suggests they give to their newly crowned victor.”

Ladislao takes the first watch as both Imelda and Harry pass out.

Harry was shaken awake and before them was the passing of the night. “Day 3.”

From District 2, Valor Whitlock.
From District 4, Pearl Darley.

Harry eyed Imelda and Ladislao. “That means Malia, Laurent, Susan, and 7 are still kicking. Gosh,” he holds his left hand to his face - covering his face. “What a beast 7 is. I mean, you saw her wounds. If I’m all grumpy about this shit,” he gestures to his shoulder, “I can only imagine what she’s going through, y’know.”

“It also means, it’s eleven o’clock at night.” Imelda tells him. “I think it’s best if we continue to sleep. I’m happy to take the next shift, Harry —you legitimately look like a ghost. You’re going to go to sleep and after you guys wake up, we are going to decide on something together as a group. But at least our odds are now completely split. One out of twelve. Half of our competitors are gone.”

Harry drowsily says, sarcastically, “yes—don’t you love the bright side

to life?"

"Go to sleep, you rat."

"Oh, my heart."

Tom had murder on his mind as he strode towards the sponsorship area of the Hunger Games. All the wealthiest members of the Capitol were here, Tom included. Additionally, so were the victors. Noticing Cedric Diggory, District 4's victor who won a four back at fourteen and is the Capitol's sweetheart, he ignored him. District 4 had nothing to offer Tom. Laurent was as good as dead, no one would want to sponsor someone as pathetic as that; and Pearl was dead. Seeing Remus Lupin, the man was next to Francisca. They seemed to be discussing something as Tom strode up to them. "Hello."

Remus choked on his milkshake - it seemed to replace the alcohol he usually ingested. "Wow," he murmured, "you look like shit."

Francisca glared at Remus before softening her gaze at him. "You look fine, Tom. Normal."

Saying nothing else, he sat opposite to the two of them.

He meant business.

Grabbing Francisca's laptop and turning it to himself, he looked at the sponsors who would offer the medicine Harry would need to heal his shoulder. A silly gauze as the one he used wouldn't be able to stop infection or entirely heal the wound. It was meant to only help with smaller wounds; less impactful. Tom didn't want Harry to maimed forever as he jotted down to memory who would be willing to offer a sponsorship for him. What he needed, Tom spun the laptop back around to Francisca. "I'm going to need you, Remus, to speak to Sir. Parker. He's willing to sponsor a high amount for Harry."

"And where is Sir. Parker?"

Tom glanced around the large room at the various tables and chairs, looking for the adult. Then, he found him. He gestured his finger at him. "At table four with the golden shimmering silver hair. Talk to him and present him the offer of accepting the sponsorship of your tribute, Harry Potter, male tribute of District 12; and that you'd like to showcase to the audience that it's his product that you're using. Harry

needs this," Tom demands. "I'm not letting you fuck this up."

Remus frowned and Tom didn't understand why. Why he was so persistent in helping now - why he was so eager to make the effort. Back when Tom asked Remus at the beginning of the games to help Harry, he dismissed him. Tom didn't get it. But when Remus departed from their table, Tom finally had his answer. Francisca explained, "Remus was having a hard time understanding our accents," she whispered. "When he heard Harry Potter, it sounded like Henry Porter to him."

"But—I don't get it, why does he care so much for him? He doesn't know him."

"He mentioned the name James Potter, however I don't know how that correlates to Harry."

James Potter.

If anything, it would have to be Harry's father. He came to District 12 alongside his wife and best friend, and would hang around the Marauders' basecamp. Where they would party and sing together. Where they met Peter. Tom knitted his eyebrows together in concentration. James Potter, if anything like Harry, would hold a resemblance since Harry is unforgettable. If Remus was beginning to understand the connection between Harry and James, then.

He bit his inner-cheek that began to bleed. Remus Lupin royally fucked up.

Tom turned his head towards where the man was making pleasantries with Sir. Parker. It seemed as if he did care but that his mind was so clouded by alcohol previously that he wasn't thinking straight. He could give him understanding but that didn't mean that Tom was going to forgive him. This was Harry's life they were talking about. Nothing was worth exchanging it. Tom tucked a curl behind his ear, knowing he looked atrocious but still - even he could make the effort to go to such lengths to help Harry even if he didn't want to.

Francisca took one of the hands Tom laid out before him and began to stroke the vital point. "Everything is going to be okay, Tom." She told him, as if she was certain. "Harry's strong. Incredibly so. Out of everyone here, he has the strongest backbone and knows how to survive. Even without this medicine, he would be able to still fight to the end." His eyes snapped to her viciously and she softened her expression. "Although, it would be best for him to receive this

medicine. For your sake and his."

"He better," Tom threatened.

On the big screen they watched as Susan woke up from being unconscious. She screamed and hissed in pain, crying and whimpering. Tom turned his gaze to the District 2 victor, Millicent Bulstrode who won two games back. She was twenty-one and glared at the scene. The other District 2 victor, Viktor Krum, appeared distant. He won five games back at eighteen. He is currently twenty-three. Both Francisca and Tom watched as Susan came to her senses as the sun blared into the bottom floor.

Standing up hesitantly, achingly, she grabbed the nearest knife and crept over to the nearest tribute to her. Laurent. Cedric Diggory strode over to where Millicent Bulstrode and Viktor Krum were standing. He shook hands with the two of them as Susan Bones took Laurent's dim life. The cannon went off. District 11's victor, Angelina Johnson came over. She won three years prior at eighteen. The other victor from District 11, Sturgis Podmore, won fifteen years back at seventeen. He was currently thirty-two. What was interesting about Sturgis Podmore was that he was albino with golden textured curls and deep purple eyes. There were some spots of dark pigment on his skin; Sturgis Podmore having the condition, vitiligo.

They also shook hands with the two victors.

The group of victors watched as Susan rose her knife to Malia's chest, stabbing her heart out. The next cannon that went signified that fourteen were dead, only ten were left. Tom bit his inner-cheek. Where those better odds for Harry?—One out of ten? It didn't feel good enough.

Francisca squeezed Tom's hand again. "Everything is going to be alright Tom. Remember. District 7's girl is almost dead. That's nearly nine out of ten odds. A third of those are Harry's allies." He supposed they were better odds than anything but it didn't make Tom reassured by anything anymore than he already was.

He jumped when he was tapped on the shoulder, snapping his head to the two victors from District 10. Newt Scamander and Emmeline Vance. Newt Scamander won his games back thirteen years ago whilst Emmeline Vance won her games nine years ago. Newt Scamander was thirty-one whilst Emmeline Vance was twenty-six. "You must be Tom Riddle." Newt began. "I've heard from some people that you've been

invested into Harry Potter, District 12's tribute."

"Yes," he agreed. "I have been."

"As you know, our tributes. Imelda and Ladislao have formed an alliance with your tribute, Harry. All we want to say is our thanks. Imelda and Ladislao would be lost without Harry — I've realised." Tom purses his lips, nodding his head at the two of them. Tom opens his mouth, "you realise that Imelda, Ladislao, and Harry are all going to split soon. It's nearly down to the last eight."

"Yes," Emmeline grumbled. "Despite that, their teamwork has led them so far now."

"We wanted to thank you as we cannot thank Harry Potter directly."

Tom bobs his head at the two of them. "If he wins, you can tell him yourself."

Newt Scamander and Emmeline Vance give each other a quick expression each at his comment. Tom adds, "if he's a victor - it would be better he knows he has allies on the outside of the games as well as in, don't you think? For your tributes."

"Yes," Newt Scamander agrees. "Just as he," Newt glares at Remus, "would be."

"He has some issues. With me around, I'll keep him in check."

At the declaration, the two victors from District 10 rose their eyebrows at him in surprise. Francisca tapped Tom's shoulder and began to talk to him about different sponsorship items so the two victors got the message to leave him alone. Tom wasn't in the mood to be forgiving.

On the screen, it changed to the outside of the prison where the Capitol got a good look of the prison for the first time ever. Tom's eyes were observing every bit of the prison. It looked abandoned and the prison looked to be on an island sort of plane with a maze trapping the tributes on the inside. It changed so the angle was eagle-eyed, facing down. The prison in the middle of the arena - acting as the cornucopia. Then there was the vicious tree maze - that had thorns on the branches as it twirled around the prison.

Then, as the camera got further away from the prison, they saw the vicious ocean that cut the prison from society. The title of the arena

finally came through: Azkaban.

Tom glared at the arena. It was as deadly as its name.

Hellish waters circled the arena with deadly animals in its ocean. The mutts. The thorns of the trees and tall heights they went to with how thick they were made it impossible to see through. Impossible to see over. There was nothing helping the tributes from the storms that leaked over the prison. As much as bright light came out from the ground floor, it was everything but paradise. It was a land for the most horrid and destructive to live. The traps that covered the floors were there as torment. To make living harder.

Tom liked the idea as an invention but he didn't like what it was causing Harry.

All of this pain.

The perspective changed onto District 7's sole tribute as she fought District 3's girl, Lux. 7 was still fighting to hell and back as she lost most of her left jaw, her right eye, her entire right arm, stab wounds on her thighs and her Achilles tendon. Everyone around her looked awful. Destroyed. She wouldn't survive, all of the Capitol knew, but she didn't give up. She didn't accept her fate. She was still fighting because she had something to fight for. However, that meant Lux was going to get the sharp end of her blade. The cannon went off and Lux was lying on the floor dead.

District 3's victor, Esteven Graves, watched sadly as she passed.

Esteven Graves won her games at sixteen over thirty-three years ago. At the moment, she was forty-nine with three children. Besides Clarisse Lanier in District 8, she was the only victor who had children. The first, at least. Her oldest was Silver. She had him at thirty-two and had Silver's younger brother, Radian at thirty-five. Radian was fourteen. And Silver's youngest sibling, Iris, was eleven. Tom watched her expression before turning his gaze back at the screen.

Rex, District 11's tribute, for the first time in a long time since he escaped outside into the maze appeared for the first time. Covered in cuts from the thorns, scars across his face and arms, held his trident. It wasn't his weapon; it being District 4's but being the size and build that he was, the eighteen year-old was able to use it well. Having practice over the past four days also helped.

7 wasn't able to hold much of a fight against the uninjured teenager

but did slice his thigh before she went down. The cannon went off to signify her death and Rex cursed at the injury she caused him. Tom watched as the District 11 victors went to go get some medicine for their tribute. The camera went back to Harry, Imelda, and Ladislao as they heard the amount of cannons that went off. They sat around the fire pit they created when they first created their alliance together. Harry sighed, looking worse for wear. “That’s two more. Sixteen are dead; only eight are left. This is it guys, we’re in the last eight.”

The last eight usually meant that loved ones from back at their Districts were interviewed. Tom hoped no one noticed that he was overly close to Harry - despite literally wanting to get sponsors for him. Harry appeared nervous and sick on screen. Imelda was shivering around the fire. To the audience, they all knew what was coming. Fevers.

Ladislao was the least injured but still looked emotionally overloaded by the fact that was coming. “We’ve got to split up,” both Imelda and Harry grumbled unhappily. Harry had tears in his eyes and Imelda sniffled, sickly.

“Not yet,” Ladislao shook his head. “At least, not until tomorrow morning please.”

Harry and Imelda didn’t look as if they wanted to decline but they knew it would’ve had to happen sooner or later. Tom wanted Harry to leave, despite how appealing his position seemed with the two tributes from District 10. Being safe was sometimes a curse in the Hunger Games. It made the mind warm, fuzzy; comforted. As if this was how it was going to be towards the end. It distracted the mind, made the tribute weak. It was a sickly disease.

Imelda glanced at Harry, the two of them agreeing with something telepathically. Tom didn’t know how they did it but Imelda and Harry were similar in many ways; perhaps, too many ways. The girl spoke up. “Who do you think you’d want the Capitol to speak the most from back at home?”

Harry answered immediately, “the Twins.”

“The twins?”

“No, the Twins.”

Harry snorted at the implication. Tom had heard of “the Twins” before but didn’t know much about them. However, Harry found this to be

the funniest thing ever. “Gosh,” he sighed, tears breaking from the corners of his eyes. “Imagine the Capitol talking with the Twins. What a catastrophe in the waiting that would be. The Twins are family friends of mine. If I’d like the Capitol to speak to anyone, it would be them. They’re extremely funny and are identical so you’re never able to tell them apart. I reckon you, Ladis, would like them the most.”

Ladislao flushed at the implication. “Really?”

“Yes, one hundred percent!” He cheered. “The Twins are like everyone’s best friends.”

“They sound like trouble,” Imelda admitted underneath her breath.

Harry snorted, patting his chest after he began to have a coughing fit. Neither tributes looked great. “They’ll take that as a compliment. Everyone will say that it’s true, however. Personally, I find them funny. They helped me when I was in sticky situations before so I owe them a favour or two. Technically, I cannot die yet whilst I have that debt to my name but at least I don’t have children I’d have to pass them to.” However, Harry seemed to be talking for the sake of talking. He did that whenever he was worried. He kept speaking until he could no longer say a word.

Imelda puffed at the impression she got from the twins. “I don’t like them.”

“I bet out of spite, they’d say they loved you too.”

“Okay,” Imelda glared. “Tell them if you win, I would’ve liked to punch them both in the jaws.”

Harry was having a great time tormenting Imelda and entertaining Ladislao from the enviable. Then, he brought up his other friend, Hermione. “Gosh, you remind me so much of Hermione.” Harry shakes his head fondly. “A complete bookworm, mind you, and a know-it-all but her humour and attitude made everyone who was worthy love her. Even Ron, the ‘opinion-is-best’ man. But he is my best mate. Hearts and kisses, guys!”

He waved to the camera at the corner of the room.

“So… Hermione? How am I—“

“You both have attitudes and don’t like the Twins! Simple as that.”

“Oh damn,” Imelda chuckled. “I’m gaining a crush.”

Harry and Ladislao broke out laughing.

Tom even smiled.

Perhaps Imelda could be redeemed if she could make Harry always laugh like that.

By the time the camera turned from them, they were still all together. Tom thinks it’s the last time he’ll ever see them like that. He also thinks it’s the last time Harry will be certain he’s safe whilst he is in the arena. The perspective of the camera changes onto Silver and… Alistar. Alistar was becoming more feral as the games went on. From killing everyone on the top floor, to remnants of the remaining players left behind on the lower floors, he was becoming more crazed by each death. He kept muttering how many tributes were left. “Eight, only eight left.”

Silver was like a scared animal backup against the wall behind him.

The room was obnoxiously bright and Alistar had his knife ready for the kill.

His knife had the blood of the other dead tributes’ on it as Alistar ran forward to kill the teenager. Silver dodged and slashed Alistar’s side. Esteven, who had found herself amongst some of the older victors, was drinking heavily. She stayed strong, holding a stern expression as her son was fighting for his life. Tom applauded her but knew this was going to happen. Silver was weak. It was bound that he would die. The fact that he stayed alive for so long was a miracle in itself. Tom was startled when Alistar slashed Silver’s entire guts, intestines, and stomach out. Esteven jumped up from the table. “Silver!” She shrieked.

District 1’s victor turned her gaze from the women as she began to cry. Silver cried but gritted his teeth together when he grabbed his knife and slashed the back of both Alistar’s calves, making him trip over in agony. The muscles there, fragile.

Silver whispered loud enough to be heard to the audience. “Harry said you guys saw me as weak. Call this revenge, asshole.”

Esteven’s head snapped to Tom who sat there, watching her sadly.

As if he was considered the victor for him. His boy. His Harry.

Her lips wobbled and she began to sob right then and there. Cedric Diggory from District 4 began to comfort the woman as she cried for her son. Tom wondered if his mother cried for him before she died as a baby or if Harry's mother and father cried for him before they died. Not knowing what would become of them once they were gone. Esteven not knowing what type of life her son would've lived if he wasn't so brutally murdered there under the name of the 74th Annual Hunger Games. However, no cannons went off.

Both were still alive, Silver and Alistar.

Except, Silver was dying ever so painfully and beyond help from the turned gazes of sponsors — and Alistar was hobbling away being past just injured. He was also injured beyond sponsor assistance. He needed a doctor and heaps of surgeries if he wanted to survive. Tom thought in his head, out of six; that meant he had the chances now of six. That was definitely more appealing.

Tom noticed movement from the corner of his eye.

Remus returned back smiling, "we've got a sponsor."

Francisca and Tom locked eyes.

This was looking even brighter for Harry.

"Alright, let's get the sponsor in order."

Chapter End Notes

little delay with this chapter,
I appreciate your kudos, subscriptions, and hits!
Ao3 writer's curse hasn't struck so hopefully it stays that way.

P S

Mastermind

Chapter Notes

Posted: 29th of February, 2024
Sorry for not posting yesterday, things were a little chaotic

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Susan Bones cried.

She clawed at her face with her right fingers trying to separate the agonising pain that Sallie Add caused her. District 7's girl. With her broken fingers and ribs - and the pounding headache that Susan declared was a concussion, she finally allowed herself to break. Malia Keist was dead. Laurent Crawford was dead. Pearl Darley was dead. *She killed them. She killed them all. Sallie was the reason why they were dead but it didn't mistake the fact that she murdered them. Leaning against the freezing cold wall, she kept scratching her face. It was her fault.*

She was a Career.

It was her job to represent her District. Valor was dead; his face showed up last night on the dead list - Sallie was dead - Lux was dead - Malia, Laurent, Pearl, Persephone, Royce, Romilda, Cliff, Sequoia, Satin, Hannah, Rante, June, and Sedge. They were all dead. Surprisingly, District 6's girl, Cress, was still alive; District 12's boy, Harry. Both of District 10's tributes, Imelda and Ladislao. Alistar was still out there somewhere. Silver, the pathetic boy was still alive and kicking. Rex wasn't a surprise. That was all her competition alive.

Cress, Harry, Imelda, Ladislao, Alistar, Silver, and Rex.

Can she win?—can she go home?

No, she shakes her head, *she can never go back home.*

She'll always be here; watching Pearl hobble and beg for help - her sentencing her to death as if she has any authority to do that over a person. Observing Laurent get stabbed in the face, ruining both his life and good looks. Something he always appreciated and protected over anything else. Malia, the girl from 11, being sliced to death. Only partnering up with them, the "Careers" because it was the only way she thought she could survive. Susan, fighting Sallie - the girl who was ruining herself to try and survive. How was this fair to anyone? It wasn't, was it.

Susan wondered what her aunt would be thinking as she saw her laying here, on the ground, utterly defeated; destroyed. *Get up, Susan. She'd tell her. Fight, it's not all lost yet. Yes, you've seen horrible things but that's life. Death is certain. Life is a choice. You want to live, you've got to fight for it. Things in this world are unfair because we make it unfair, it's human nature. So if you want to live over the others, you've got to stand up and make the world bend to your will. Be the life choice that makes everyone hate you if you must; it's the price of living. No one human is good, but we can make good choices. It's us who makes life worth living. Death accompanies us because it's a shared human experience. Make life a story worth living.*

Sniffling, she begins to try and stand up.

Fight, she reminds herself. *Life hasn't taken her now.*

Susan uses her greatest weapon, her intelligence to help her out. Rex and Cress are outside. She knows that. If anything, Imelda, Harry, and Ladislao would've created an alliance. They would've been able to take out one of her Careers. Either Valor or Persephone. Susan intuitively knew who they took out and accepted it as simply as she could, by crying. Valor was a ditz, she knew. Despite being physically strong, he wasn't the most academic. Volunteered, despite being third-best in the academy solely to Susan and Terry, he was the next best choice.

Susan grew up with Valor. Beginning to train in the Academy when she was only six years-old, her aunt wanted her to have the best chance at winning if she were to be picked. Not like that mattered for the District 2 tributes anyway, the girl and boy always had volunteers who were only picked by the Academy officials.

She took poor Beta's place and Valor took Torrac's place.

Technically, Terry was going to be the male tribute for the 74th Annual Hunger Games but he damaged his ACL two weeks before the Reaping Day. They had a conversation before she went into the games, where he told her that out of everyone in their District - she had the highest chance of winning. Being eighteen, being the most agile, strongest, and most intelligent even he, Terry Boot, was scared of her and was glad he no longer had to face her as an opponent. And that bothered her, made her angry because if she was to head into the arena with anyone; she'd rather it be the genius of their District, then the strongest male of their District.

Valor was like a child to Susan.

After analysing him for so long, she decided the few quirks about him that made him unique. He had dyslexia and ADHD which made him more energetic and dazed than the rest of the tributes. With the exception of Rex, who Susan suspected had an underlying case of autism and Sallie, who to Susan felt like a kleptomaniac; wanting to take and take, impulsively but also because of the high rush that came with it. *She couldn't help herself,* Susan knew, *but it didn't make it more irritating that she tried to take her life from her. But she was dead now*.

Actually, if Susan was to say anything it would be about Harry Potter.

He was the weirdest and most abnormal tribute for a reason that she couldn't pinpoint. He got on her nerves because of his inherent intelligence despite being a massive idiot. He tripped over about three times whilst wielding a knife. He fell off the climbing ropes. Forgot he was sorting the berries. Spilt food all over him during meals. Choked on water twice; and air once. Got his unruly hair caught in a spear once. Sneezed during every conversation their personal trainer was having with them. However, it appeared that once he was in the *analysing mood* like Susan appeared vicious. The Career mindset which only Alistar had a part from Susan.

Receiving a score of nothing during their private session was a deflection she could see the minute it popped up onto their television screen. Valor said he must be a really weak kid with an iron deficiency if he couldn't hold up a knife without tripping over, which Susan laughed at during the time, but knew too that it was a lie. It must be.

The Interviews proved it.

She didn't like to leave her shields unprotected.

The contagious smile, the natural charismatic personality, the boyish slant, the mismatched facial features that locked together perfectly on his face, the calculated stare, the tongue that kept its blade ready at all times; his emerald eyes. As much as she disliked him, she would respect him. It was obvious his mind was thinking of things twenty-four seven and made him appear loopy like Susan at times, and she could respect the Career-mindset hussle. Everyone was trying to survive for a reason. Susan could get that. And it was annoying that he decided to partner-up with *Judgy* and *Loser*.

Out of everyone, her Career line-up was going to be; *Susan #2, Star,*

and ADHD + Dyslexia Combo.

She didn't need *Underworld Divorce, or Love-Depressed, or Mermaid Necklace, or—actually no. Susan wasn't going to lie to herself. Malia* was *a good investment. She just didn't get the chance to utilise her properly.*

Thinking about the past wasn't going to do her any good. She should move on.

Wrapping her hand with the bandages and gauze she found in Laurent's, Malia's, and Pearl's packs; she ended up finding a small amount of stitches she tried to stitch her hand back up together. Unfortunately, she wasn't a medic - she was self-sufficient with the works of the mind so her handy work wasn't nearly as successful as she would've liked it to be. It appeared to be a mess. Sighing, she rested her head up against the wall; fuck what wouldn't she love more than to be in the Capitol's luxurious bathtub right now. Resting, sinking underneath the water.

There was always the chance of killing herself if things got bad but that would be humiliating to her District. Her aunt who would have to deal with the humiliation. Valor's family, the Academy, Terry. Gosh, she couldn't die like that. The best chance was to die in battle like a warrior. Bring honour to the family's name, at the very least. She could do that, she reassured herself.

There were only eight of them left.

Her odds were out of seven; that was good.

Rex and Crass were outside. They have been since the beginning of the games. Harry, Imelda, and Ladislao would have had to have broken up by now; despite their strong alliance, it was down to the last eight. They wouldn't have wanted to have the opportunity for either one of them to be able to kill each other. It was simple. Imelda would be the adventurous one being closest to Susan. Ladislao would stay in-between both Imelda and Harry due to his eye and their overbearing love for the teenager; and Harry would venture upstairs. *Susan would never see her miracle boy again. Pity. But Alistar or Silver would. Good luck, 'Star and Silver; he's up and kicking.*

Susan had to make a decision.

Staying out in the open was no longer a good decision. She was by herself and realistically, she would want to find the nearest floor that had the most hidden spots so she could conceal herself from the

world. Hide like Rex and Crass were doing, but out-looking the maze of thorns she felt discouraged. It was only so big and it looked vicious, riddled with complications. The best choice would be to head upstairs where Imelda would be her first target. Then, Ladislao, then—Harry. But by the time he got to Harry, she might be dead.

Deciding she could live with that, she hobbled forward; concussion—killing her.

Susan finds that the immediate look of the first floor is killing her. It was another maze, full of mirrors with a blinding light that was heightening the pain of her concussion. She swore, shaking her head which made it infinitely worse but barred her teeth. Thinking of Terry's song, she ventured through the maze of mirrors. *When worst comes to worst, never surrender your throne, Susan, your Heart of bones. Terry had a beautiful voice. You may get stones thrown at you, but to whom it matters, they're all clones of each other. Beautiful, girl of Bones.*

She wiped the tears from her eyes as she stumbled through, touching the sharp shards of glass so she didn't bump into the harsh material. Terry was like a brother to Susan. A mentor. An ally. Nonetheless someone she held dear to her heart. It was bothersome that she held no feelings for him. Susan, in general, found men to be disgusting, but Terry changed her mind ever so slightly. She was entirely asexual despite her platonic love for him. Like a brother.

She followed the light forever until she glanced down at a disgusting smell.

What the fuck was she—

"Oh, noticed?" A voice began. "Damn, I wish Potter was here to see this."

Glancing up, Imelda was glaring at her. "This pee is yours?"

"Ours."

Susan jumped out of the way in time for the knife Imelda threw at her to ricochet from the mirror and onto the floor. Immediately, she had her own knife in her hand and used her left hand to fight. Imelda also seemed to struggle, coordinating her attacks as she gained an injury on her right hand. "Valor?" She questioned, biting her bottom lip to concentrate but she was struggling. Susan got closer to her when Imelda answered, "yes. Although, you should've seen the state we left him in. Brutal. Just up the stairs if you really want to see." Susan's

vision went red.

Imelda wasn't able to dodge out of the way quick enough.

Susan *stabbed, stabbed,* and *stabbed.*

She was allowed to murder one of her best friends; she'll allow it, but taunting his life. That was something beyond unacceptable. They were put in here due to their societal structure. Imelda was chosen, unlike Susan. She didn't want this outcome unlike Susan. She had more authority to allow more taunts than Susan did, because if Susan did she was being cocky. It was a dumb move, but at the end of the day, whoever thought they were better than another person's life was only kidding themselves.

She *took* her eyes first.

She *allowed* her to scream.

She *gave* her the chance to get away.

She *let* her mourn.

Unlike Valor.

Susan stabbed both of her eardrums. Thrashed an X into her chest. Penetrated her knife into her arteries. She wanted Imelda to bleed out, hurt. However, the damn girl was still alive and grabbed onto Susan's breasts—the closest thing to her and yanked. Susan landed on Imelda's chest and was turned around so Imelda was straddling her, strangling her. *She couldn't breathe. Her mind was going blank. Susan froze. Her mind felt constricted, as if a baby snake was wrapping itself around her thoughts. Comforting her whilst adding more pressure to her words as she* ***SCREAMED****.*

Imelda sobbed in pain, blinded, but had the last laugh. "*Not so brave now, you cun—*"

Susan used her knife and implanted it into Imelda's jugular. She choked, letting go of her knife, landing back in the piss—clenching her throat, trying to find her voice. *It was gone. It was gone.* Smelling the atrocious vile that was piss, her brain was overloaded as Susan passed out.

Harry was surprised to find the third floor completely covered in

poisonous vines. As if the floor had changed overnight, it was now completely covered in poison that made boils appear on one's skin if touched. It would make fighting harder; Harry concluded as he used the jagged edge of his knife to cut down the thick vines. That was also a challenge. It was time consuming and the more Harry watched the vines behind him, noticed how they began to connect again - quickly; and how they grew in size the longer he was waiting around for. Concluding he needed to get to the fourth floor and quick, Harry hoped he didn't come across Alistar.

It would make everything a hundred times worse if he came across Alistar and had to fight him in this poisonous vine catastrophe.

Harry gritted his teeth whenever he felt the pain in his shoulder. It was unforgettable the pain, but thinking occasionally made him forget for a moment what he was going to have to live with from now on. He slashed the vines, hurrying forward. Glad for his endurance, he kept ignoring the boils that were growing around his calves and wrists.

The cannon went off.

Frozen, Harry paused, glancing behind him. Who was dead?

It couldn't have been Ladislao. He was protected between Imelda and him like a sandwich. Rex wouldn't have died. District 6's girl possibly could've died but not from Red. It was between Imelda and Susan. One of them killed the other. He hissed when a vine wrapped itself around his ankle.

"Fucking bastard," he slashed the vine - noticing the boils that were appearing there.

Continuing to cut through the vines, he found himself growing more desperate to find the fourth level. Harry couldn't continuously keep cutting at the vines, he would need to sleep at one point. Eat. Go to the bathroom. Harry couldn't keep this up forever but he knew what would've happened if he stopped; being strangled alive; boils covering his skin from head to toe. He could only imagine what it would've been like. Boils possibly grow in his mouth, throat, and internal body. Around his groin. None of it sounded pleasant, a painfully slow death.

As if he was trapped in a cobweb; around a snake; tightened until he eventually was strangled to death if the boils didn't kill him first.

Then, he saw it.

The first sign of Alistar.

The teenager was breathing heavily as he thrashed through the vines. Harry observed him as he stayed in place, locking eyes with the wounds on his face, shoulders, body. The boils that were covering his face, ankles, and wrists. The desperation; the exhaustion. The utter defeat. He had a cut across his cheek, a purple eye. The teenager seemed to be struggling to stay on his feet. Then, Harry saw his injuries. Both calves were slashed and tears were sliding down Alistar's face, trying to turn back around to where Harry saw the set of stairs.

Additionally, Harry saw where Alistar was holding his side, blood seeping from his fingers. He was badly hurt; *he could take him in a fight—Alistar was beyond help; completely torn calves; slashed side, blistering boils covering more of his vital areas—Harry could kill him if he must. No, he would. Put the poor boy out of his misery.*

Slashing the poisonous vines, Harry crept closer and closer until Alistar glanced up to make eye contact with him. Harry had bit his lip so much trying to distract himself from the pain that he had a busted lip. Continuing to persist through, Alistar slowed down. The eighteen year-old glared at him. Vicious, like a wild animal. Like 7 when she went to stab Laurent, Malia, Pearl—Harry had to keep his distance, although that wouldn't affect him much.

The state Alistar was in made him almost pre-defeated.

He was scared. That's what animals did when they were scared.

Harry needed to put him down gently.

Finally, when Harry cut the last vine that kept him from Alistar, he pushed him onto his back. Alistar landed onto his back without a fight due to his calves giving out underneath him. Then, his expression that was vicious turned frightened. Scared. Terrified and equally traumatised. He murdered almost a quarter of the tributes by himself; of course he was like this. Dragging Alistar up the stairs, he couldn't kill him on the third floor. It would be too heartbreaking knowing he was trying to escape the vines but in the end, couldn't. Never. It was the last thing he'd ever do for him. Alistar sobbed—and he held out his knife at him as if he remembered he had it.

"I'm sorry." Alistar blurted out. "I didn't mean to kill them—I—" he hiccuped.

“I know,” Harry breathed sadly. “I know.”

Alistar murmurs, “I’m sorry—I—I have to fight you.”

“I understand.”

Harry grabbed his knife and moved closer to Alistar who wasn’t moving from the floor. Alistar threw his knife at Harry with all the energy he left and Harry was unable to move out of the way quick enough for it to nick his left upper arm, “fuck. Just my luck,” Harry groaned. Alistar cried, leaning back against the brightly burning floor.

Falling forward clumsily—exhaustedly; with his bladder full, he crawled closer to Alistar who didn’t move, didn’t even try to attack—Harry straddled him as he grabbed his smaller throwing knife and put it against his jugular. His lips were on Alistar’s left ear as he murmured. “Since you’ve accepted your death, I’ll humour you. The third floor wasn’t originally poisonous vine. It was nothing. A safe sense of security. The second floor was total darkness; humourous, no?” Referring to what Harry joked about before the Hunger Games began. “The first floor was all mirrors with this,” he gestured to the blinding brightness, “light. And the ground floor was nothing. Just an escape to the outside. Imelda, Ladislao, and I teamed up. Your girl died on the second floor. I found her body and mourned her for you; and your District.”

Alistar couldn’t stop the shakes he felt as Harry wrapped him into a hug. “Susan, Malia, and Laurent teamed-up on the ground floor. Pearl fought 7. They were both badly injured but were on the first floor and stumbled to the ground floor where our trio followed them. Pearl was murdered by Susan. 7 fought the trio; Malia, Laurent, and Susan were unconscious and 7 ran into the woods, horribly injured. Susan woke up and killed Malia and Laurent. I—“ Harry hiccuped, sniffling. “I also think she might’ve killed Imelda. We split-up. Imelda downstairs. Ladislao, dark floor. Me, third. Now, forth. Where I’ve met you.”

“‘Star,” he slurred, Alistar leaning his head into his jaw and cheek, “I’m sorry, m’kay—I am too.”

“Y-you killed Valor.”

“Mhm,” he agreed. “And I’m sorry I have to kill you too.”

“S-S-Sil-ver said you told him that everyone saw him as weak. That him, carving out my calves was revenge. You did a good job, I reckon.” He murmured, the teenager giving up. Alistar was resigned

with himself. “He’s certainly not a weak bunny is for sure.” Harry kissed Alistar’s forehead and slashed his jugular.

Alistar’s body spammed underneath him, Harry still holding him in a hug as he rubbed soothing circles into his right shoulder. Alistar cried and slumped against him. The cannon went off. Then, Harry watched as the hologram appeared before him. “Day 5.”

From District 1—Harry cried out, mournfully. *Alistar Fenlon.*

And he cried hard when: *From District 10, Imelda Garcia* appeared on the screen.

She was dead. Alistar was dead. Susan was still alive.

The number went from eight to six in the matter of a day.

But Silver was still alive, especially after encountering Alistar who was injured because of him.

Hissing and departing from the leaking body of Alistar Fenlon, he gave one last kiss to the gorgeous teenager’s forehead and hobbled over to the door of the fourth floor. Nobody was here besides Silver, he told himself. Everyone else was beneath the second floor. He was safe up here. Needing to take a piss, he relieved himself and sat down to eat. He ate some of the canned food he got from Satin’s pack and leaned his head up against the wall. There were only six tributes left. Silver. Ladislao. Susan. Rex. District 6’s girl. And himself.

He had to kill Silver to put him out of his misery, he thought to himself. There was no way Ladislao was going to be able to come up to the fourth floor to do it for him. And there was no way Harry could imagine Silver himself could do it. No, he had to do it. Ladislao—Harry wasn’t going to be able to kill. For Imelda’s memory, he would stay hidden forever to Harry. For them.

Susan… if she met Imelda, then she was bound to be bleeding out as well.

Harry would be able to kill her but he had a hard time imagining how he was going to get down from the third floor to be able to do so. Rex would possibly kill District 6’s girl but Harry couldn’t imagine him doing so. She would either kill Rex or Rex would defend himself, but if District 6’s girl was deciding to wait it out—they were going to end up in a stand still. Ladislao wouldn’t come up and kill him. Not after he sees the vines, even if he wants to. Not with his eye. Ladislao might

find Susan and kill her for murdering Imelda but; Harry can't imagine him going down the stairs to try and fight Rex or District 6's girl.

The mutts were going to end them, Harry suspected.

After the crowd got bored with Harry murdering Silver, the game makers would send out mutts for the tributes to fight against. It was either that or begin to shrink the arena and make them in close quarters. Hobbling through the blinding bright rooms, he felt frightened. Tripping over his own toes due to his exhausted state, he let himself relax against the floor for a few moments before cursing himself and sitting back up. *He had to find Silver.*

Harry spent hours searching for the teenage boy, forgetting how long it took to get through the different rooms - especially when something specific was at stake. First trying to find Ladislao. Secondly, get through the mirror maze. Then, get through the poisonous vines. Now this. Every floor was time consuming. He bet the fifth room was the worst. Especially if it took Alistar five days to get to the third floor.

In all honesty, Harry started on the third floor, almost made it down to the ground floor, and then back up to the fourth floor in five days. That is seven floors, in comparison to his two. Then, Harry heard it. The groaning. It was low, but it caught Harry's attention. It was the first sound he heard besides his own heavy breathing and footsteps in a hot second. He stopped to investigate what direction it came from. His left—no his right, no—

He stepped towards the doors, trying to hear which one it was louder behind. Then, he found the loudest door. Opening it up slowly, he peered inside to find a horrifying scene behind the door. Sure the blood helped Harry get there, but it was splattered all across the room it was hard to tell which door it came from. The groaning stopped as Harry paused at the scene, gaping. "Silver…"

Hobbling into the room, Harry tilted his head. "I'm guessing he got you?"

He wanted to seem non-threatening, for his sake.

Silver was shaking and shivering at his words.

Harry sighed, moving closer to his body. "This floor feels so exhausting."

He ignored his splattered guts, intestines, and stomach that were

displayed out on the floor. Silver's bottom lip began to wobble and he cried nonexistent tears, unable to physically cry. A lot of his organs were being held together by Silver's legs, but they were becoming exhausted being held up like they were. He could tell from the way they wobbled. Harry felt tears stream from his face, knowing he couldn't help himself. This was depressing.

Sitting beside Silver, he began to pat and stroke his hair. Silver quietly leant into the sensation. Harry began to lay down on the floor next to Silver, Silver resting his head on Harry's chest. He held up the boy for him. "I'm not going to make this long for you like Alistar," he admitted. He stroked the bangs on Silver's forehead. "I killed him. That cannon, it was him. I got revenge for you and I heard you got revenge for yourself. I'm sure your mother doesn't know—" Silver flinched at the comment, "that they tormented you for having a heart. But I know. Alistar admitted you weren't weak as a bunny, that you are so much more than that. I want you to know that, Silver."

Silver's eyes began to leak tears. "He said you got your revenge."

"I'm so proud of you, and I bet your mother would be too. They're so proud of you, Silver."

Harry kisses his forehead. "And I'm sorry."

"T-t-thank y-you."

"No problem, sweetness."

———

And then, Harry murdered Silver Graves for everyone to see.

Tom, Narcissa, Bella, Lestrange, Lucius, Nott, Evans, Barty, Alecto, Amycus, Yaxley, Yaxley's sister, Goyle, Crabbe, Gibbon, and Greengrass all compiled into the Black's living room as they watched Harry murder yet another tribute. That was two direct kills and one indirect kill to his name. It also meant that now the odds for him were out of four. Five tributes were remaining. Narcissa sobbed with Greengrass, Bella, and Lucius. "Gosh," she shook her head. "How can he have such a heart of an angel in an arena like this?"

Because—that's Harry.

It was because it was Harry that this was allowed.

Bella stroked her sister's cheek as she leant into her chest. "Silver deserved to die pleasantly, despite being so weak. Harry has to become this year's victor. I'll riot if he isn't." Bella declares and for once, Tom agrees with her which was a scary thought.

Nott spoke up from where he sat at the end of the couch alongside bed-rested Evans. "I'm adding on the addition of Esteven Graves' interview."

"She did an interview?" Lestrange gaped.

"Top 8 Interview, technically, however it was done after Silver's death."

"In like five minutes?" Barty questioned.

Tom glared harshly at Barty and the adult zipped his mouth. Everyone watched the interaction happen but didn't comment as Tom began to pace around the room. He gestured to the television screen, "play the video" he commanded. Nott took no time to hesitate. Then, on the screen was a red eyed Esteven, but she didn't look distraught. Tom knew the look: she accepted Silver's death before it had already happened. When his guts were ripped out for all to see, she accepted it and mourned his death then. The woman lost her child to the Hunger Games. She began, "first out of everyone in this universe - I thank Harry Potter. Knowing this is going to be broadcasted to the Districts, I want District 12 to see this - my interview first. To Harry Potter's friends and family, I want to say to you from one mother to another, you are forever in my debt."

Lestrange gaped. "Can she say this?"

"She is," Tom nods. "And can, I suppose."

"Harry Potter—" Esteven sniffled, eyes becoming watered with tears. "I am forever grateful for the kindness that you have shown my son. I didn't know that he was struggling with the tributes. He never told me and I suppose that goes to show how much he trusts me as a mother but—out of everyone who didn't show him kindness, you did. You told him to stand up for himself. I'm glad. My boy has never been much of a fighter. My youngests are the fighters of the family but Silver," her bottom lip wobbled. "He's my baby and I didn't want him to go through the games like I did. Thank you for being there during his last moments, giving him mercy, and sparing to tell him how we are proud of him; it makes me thankful for how he passed. I'm forever in debt."

Tom left the room to head upstairs to the balcony, physically he could no longer be in a room with Barty, or any of those meaningless faces as he pulled out a cigarette from his pocket.

The Capitol seems small from the Black's balcony.

Leaning up against the railing, he glared against the city. The more and more he watched, the less he wanted to become president. Back when he was a kid, it was all about gaining more power and being able to be in control of everything he wanted. It was easy to like the role of becoming the President of the entire country, but now. It was a sour taste on his tongue. It was putrid. Tom wanted nothing less to become president. Not now that Harry was clashing with his world - and not now that Tom wanted him to clash more.

He heard the door click open behind him. "I don't need to hear whatever you're about to—"

"I'm not one of them. I won't say something stupid," Andromeda's voice rings out.

Not seeing her since the Tribute's Parade, the teenager slumped up against the railing beside him and flicked her two fingers forward as if asking for one. Defeatedly, Tom passed her one and handed her his lighter. After stealing Barty's, he decided he no longer could keep anything that belonged to the teenager so he asked Narcissa to buy them for him. He didn't want to be seen buying anything controversial. Andromeda put the cigarette against her naturally plump lips. She handed him the lighter back. In the distance, they watched the interviews of the family members be conducted on the ginormous television screen where members of the Capitol would be able to watch from restaurants and rooftop parties.

Andromeda sighs. "I hate the games."

"You know," Tom puts the cigarettes to his lips and drags it away. "I think I do too."

She quirks a devious smile at him. "So you're finally understanding. It's a good look, Tom."

"You're not even going to ask about him?"

"I don't need to talk to Harry to know you're completely infatuated with him. Your eyes light up, the world seems less dim, and whenever it seems you're not around him. You're technically a hot mess,"

Andromeda pats Tom's back comfortingly. "However, now that you've come to the conclusion that the world is better without the Hunger Games, what are you going to do about it?"

Tom doesn't have an answer to that. He'd like Harry to live in the Capitol with him but once Harry won the Hunger Games, he wouldn't like anything more than to go home. Back to District 12 where all his friends and pseudo-family is waiting for him. He would be back for the Victory Tour, he reminded himself but besides that; Tom would only get to see Harry once a year when the Hunger Games rolled around. He's thought of this a million times but Tom couldn't see Harry coping with the Hunger Games. Harry would beg Tom to do something about the Hunger Games but all Tom knew is that if he rose to power, became the President, he would see the benefits of the Hunger Games to the Capitol. He wouldn't change a thing and their relationship would break completely. He told Andromeda all of this.

"You didn't answer my question."

"What was your question?"

"Have you come to the conclusion that the world is better without the Hunger Games?"

Tom thought about that too. The Hunger Games was only a means to the end. The Capitol was sinister. It wasn't as if they were at all innocent. Murder happened on live-television each year and children betted on which child was going to die last. Tom was a victim of this cruel system. So was Andromeda. But the rest of the teenagers downstairs still were stuck with the fantasy that was the Hunger Games as if it was a drug. Tom knew better. Harry made him see more clearly.

If there wasn't a Hunger Games, and a rebellion occurred—he knitted his eyebrows together.

"You're telling me that if a rebellion would occur, you'd pick the rebel's side?"

"Yes," Andromeda hums - content. "It's bound to happen and they're bound to win."

"What makes you think that?"

Using her pointer finger, she pointed at Harry. "I'm going to say this and you're not going to repeat this to anyone, Tom Riddle unless you

want me to hunt you down personally. Harry Potter is a being that is beyond the trapped walls of what comes after the games. He's not going to let the Districts, his District, his home starve whilst these games continue. He is going to want freedom. An unstoppable force isn't going to stop moving once it's started."

"Harry Potter, the teenager on the screen, is passionate. Wished his enemies a good afterlife. Kissed both of them on the head as if he was an Angel of Death; wishing them well. Besides that, he hasn't killed anyone offensively. Even with Valor, he tried his best not to harm him brutally. Coaxed him to death. Watched and teamed-up with District 10; whose girl's death he cried over." Andromeda takes another drag of her cigarette, "this teenager is everything that stands against the games. The *ruthless, murderous, brutal* District kids Dumbledore wants to see isn't in him. He smiles at his competition, jokes around with them; I mean, that whole piss situation I've never seen before. He made both Imelda and Ladislao sad at leaving him."

"He made all of these teenagers adore him." Andromeda laughed wickedly. "It's not to mention the manipulation he's shown to all the Capitol. Gaining a 0 in his training score; I bet you told him to gain a high number because he could have but he proved you wrong. Additionally, tricked the Capitol and the tributes to be cautious of him but not to actively seek him out. Clever boy." She smokes more. "Harry to the Districts isn't going to be seen as some random District 12 boy."

"You're saying he's the hope for the war?"

"Precisely, so no matter what Harry will pick - he'll always choose what he thinks is right comparatively to your own morals. Now, it's all a matter of - what are you going to do? Give it all up for him and fight for the side of the war that will win, or defend your losing side and lose him."

Andromeda wasn't looking at Tom. She was staring out at all the laughter that was coming from the Twins Interviews, Harry convinced the Capitol to allow it because of his previous comments about them. *This was his impact, she was referring to. To both sides; they'll see this and scatter. One will grow more frightened of him, the other will grow stronger because of him. It was all the matter of what Tom was going to choose.*

"You want me to choose Harry."

"There's nothing left for you here." Andromeda points to the screen.

“You think Dumbledore is going to allow you to be a free bird with your lover for any longer?—he let you have a taste for freedom, but that hope you feel for the two of you will always been surrounded by caged bars. Jailed inside your heart. He’s not going to allow you and Harry to happen. It’s either you choose Harry now or let Dumbledore get his way, and we both know between the two of us; you have the most power to change the tide of the war. The President’s successor defying him?—That speaks more words than Harry’s defiance in the arena.”

Tom didn’t move when it started to rain. Neither did Andromeda.

Andromeda placed her hand onto Tom and he allowed her.

“You and Harry; if you follow through with the war will be able to live peacefully. New rules will be put in place so you two will be able to live freely. Harry will get his wish. The Districts will no longer live under the rule of the Capitol. And you will get your wish; being with Harry, and having been presented the option of power to help rebuild the new world. Nobody will defy you or him. They will accept you both as word. Power and love will be with your names. Acceptance.” Andromeda takes another drag of her cigarette. She lets go of his wrist. “Hard times are coming for the both of you. Pick the choice that in the end will give you both want you most desire.”

“What about my reputation? If I betray my home—“

“Is this really your home, Tom?” Andromeda turns her back to him. “I know it isn’t mine.”

“Yes, but everything I’ve ever done—“

“Everyone will respect you.”

Andromeda continued to speak, holding her cigarette beyond the rails. “You two both have big reputations. From what I’ve heard, Harry has had many lovers before and you’ve had none. If the rebels decide to make him their symbol; that’s adding to that reputation. Likewise, your the President’s successor. I’ve already told you that’s a bigger deal than Harry if you decide to switch sides for him but you will have a scandalous reputation here in the Capitol, not like that matters. There are always scandals every day of our lives. My life’s a scandal because I don’t like the Hunger Games which apparently makes me anti-Capitol. Although, thanks to my family’s reputation I haven’t been banished from the house.” Andromeda shrugs her shoulders. “It comes with the territory that you’ll have a big reputation but,” she

turns her head and smirks. “Isn’t it freeing defying the expectations someone has apparently claimed they had on you?—come on,” Andromeda smiles. “Neither you or Harry like Dumbledore. Don’t act as if you want to make him proud. Defy him. You’ll find pleasure in doing so even if you give up everything that comes with it.”

She smirks at him. “You and Harry are quite cute, you know. You’ll be endgame if you play your cards right, although—“ she winks at him. “If I know anything from this main beau he keeps mentioning, I think you’ve already caught his heart and he knows it. Is proud of it.”

Tom blushes.

“Call me when you’ve decided you’re past having a big reputation. I’ll be here.”

Andromeda left the rooftop and Tom found himself dropping his finished cigarette down the building. He pulled himself another one. *Betraying the Capitol; not becoming the President; defying Dumbledore; being with Harry.* They were all compelling arguments. *Gaining respect; living freely.* He felt the chemicals in the cigarettes calm him down, making him able to think clearly. It wasn’t as if he wasn’t already betraying the Capitol, he tells himself.

Drinking and partying made Tom more mouldable, but he wasn’t defying the Capitol. He was making people like him. Avoiding sex was one of the things that made him defy the Capitol, in spite of this. Sex was something that made people know you. Tom never gave that to someone because he didn’t want anyone to know him. He flushed at the thought of Harry. Harry had sex with people all the time back at home because he felt free and had nothing to hide. Realistically speaking, if Harry wanted to have sex with Tom - he would’ve. But because he hadn’t, Tom supposed the opposite was happening with Harry. Sex was something freeing in the Districts. If you were already going to die, you may as well have fun beforehand.

But no, when it came to Harry with Tom - he didn’t touch him like that. Not yet. Harry wasn’t having sex with Tom because he wanted to know Tom. Sex, sure, was a way for people to know you; but for Harry, talking to him was more important than touch unlike Tom. Showing his touch was what made people know him. They truly were opposites, weren’t they?

Again, it made Tom think about Barty because now he wasn’t a virgin.

At the end of the day, Tom reflected, he only had sex with Barty to

further improve Harry's chance at winning. He did it for Harry. If he put it up against his principle of having sex for people to get to know him; he wasn't having sex with Barty for Barty to know him. He had sex with Barty for Barty to know that he didn't want to know him. That it was necessary; not something that he was doing freely. It was a means to an end. Hypothetically speaking, if Harry didn't have sex with someone - that technically didn't mean he wanted to get people to know him. He could be doing it manipulatively like what Tom did to Barty. A means to an end.

Realistically, speaking since Barty wasn't truly knowing him through sex… did that still make Tom a virgin?—he didn't know, he wasn't an expert in sex for the linguistics that came with it. Tom flushed, narrowing his eyes at the screen in the far distance.

Smoking was another habit he picked up that was defying the Capitol. The Capitol was allowed to do whatever they liked with their bodies. Have high-end makeup trends, odd fashion, looks that made people awe at them but Tom wasn't. He was told explicitly by Dumbledore that he wasn't to change a single thing about himself. That his natural beauty captured the attention of the Capitol. That natural beauty was something the District's would take seriously but he began to smoke. Image was also associated with being 'all natural.'

That meant vaping, smoking, and anything else damaging to his body wasn't something he was allowed to do either. Drinking was the sole exception because out of all those things, it did the least damage. Tom thought slowly it was eventual that he betrayed the Capitol when he looked at the small things. Then, there was Harry.

Harry made everything worse; and Tom supposed it was bad that he was addicted to him.

Tom felt as if he was doing something extremely bad.

But—no one was convincing him not to.

Chapter End Notes

Next chapter... I Did Something Bad
I'm super duper tired so I'm about to go night night but knew I couldn't let u guys go too long without a chapter, sorry people!!
I'm doing like heaps of sports so I'm like 0.0 bout to be -.-
thanks people for 1500 hits! and 50 subs and 38 kudos peps
AHHHHHHHH

P S

I Did Something Bad & Fifteen

Chapter Notes

Posted: 3rd of March, 2024
WARNING!! Talk of Harry being groomed in his childhood.

*Note: it does into a little bit of detail but it's from Harry's perspective so his opinion on what happened is still very... complex. His flaws, basically. Anyway, just be cautious when reading this chapter!! :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry slept for a long time.

With his injured shoulder and upper arm that he wrapped poorly beforehand, and with the murder on his consciousness, he was in a deep slumber when he woke up to something touching him. Shrieking awake, yanking and throwing the thing away from him - he had his knife in his hand before he could scream. Then, his eyes adjusted to the absurd light, and blinked curiously at the object. It was an aluminium cylinder and Harry's eyes widened. *That was a sponsor*, he realised.

Crawling forward, leaning up against the wall he threw the cylinder against, he twisted it opened. Harry observed the contents. It was an unusual sponsor gift as he tilted his head at the two things that laid inside of the cylinder. A smaller cylinder was inside of the bigger one — which he twisted open to find out it was specialised medicine for his shoulder and all the equipment Harry would need to make his own stitches. He softly smiled at the gift, putting all the contents on the floor before he realised there was a small slip of paper inside of the cylinder.

Harry picked it up and it read: ***"Everyone loves you — T."***

Smiling at the note, he turned to the pendant that was around his neck. Opening it up that had Percy's letter inside of it, he tucked Tom's note away. If things got extremely bad, he would read it again to remind himself of the good times. Taking off his jacket, he began to search for the bandages he found from Silver's bag. Then, he began to unwrap the bandage.

Noticing how infected the wound was, he hissed as he dipped his

fingers into the cream before massaging it into his skin. Harry wasn't one hundred percent sure the best way to do stitches for this particular wound since it was deeply damaged into his joint, but if all things went like how he usually sewed up nicked arteries if he pressed the two split parts of the skin together, despite the outpour of blood; beginning to use the needle to connect the two points, it should keep itself together as long as Harry didn't do excessive labour with his right arm.

Whilst he did the stitches, he realised how the specialised medicine had a numbing element to it so he sighed in relief as he was able to penetrate his skin without it making it feel like it was on fire. Additionally, it lessened the pain of the infection.

Once all the main bits of skin were tied together, Harry cut the string before rubbing - more softly - more of the medicine into the top of the wound. Then, he moved onto the slash he had on his upper left arm. It needed to be stitched up as well from the looks of it. Back when he was eleven and enviable tripped over enough on dangerous sharp objects, Sirius taught him extensive medical aid they taught him whilst he was a peacekeeper. How to stitch up all kinds of wounds, what medicines were able to help different kinds of wounds, how to detect if a wound was gaining an infection - symptoms of diseases and other issues - and able to label certain things only a doctor would know how to.

As a result, Harry became known to be the medic of District 12. Molly, the Weasleys' mother, was always helpful with assisting Harry care for others, especially during the harsh winters. Fred and George, with their cunning wit, helped Harry attain medical herbs and berries from the forest outside of District 12; and Harry helped them collect wood, sometimes with Charlie, and hunt for game. Ron came with Harry during these adventures but mostly helped with the wood chopping and hunting, whilst Ginny learnt from Harry a lot of the ways to tend to others. Hermione, being one of Harry's closest friends like Ron, would come over to the Weasleys' house during the times where he was trying to tend for others and write down in their book called *Hunters Guide For Healing* how to help and heal others. What herbs to use, what alcohols, who to ask for certain things and what to exchange, what children were the most becoming of medics: Ginny, Abele, and the Merchant kid, Robin.

Once Harry was reaped, Ginny would've been the first person to take over the business they had created to be able to heal others. Hermione would've assisted her with all the knowledge she had gained from

observing Harry; the different surgeries and practices; and the kids would've helped.

Spreading the cream over his upper arm, he numbed it before he began to stitch the wound together. Then, after it was tightly secured, he used a generous amount of cream on top of the stitches before he wrapped more of the bandage he found tightly against the wound. Harry used a little of the cream for his busted lip, and other small cuts he had over his body before putting the remains of what was left of the cream back in his bag. Slinking it over his shoulder, he stood up and felt a lot better. Walking away from his sleeping spot, he went back to find the staircases to the fifth floor.

As if he's been to every room already, Harry kept walking in circles, bored of being unable to find the entrance of the fifth floor. He was partially scared of what he would find on the floor but if Alistar was able to survive, Harry thought he would be able to as well. Harry sat down and opened his bag to eat one of the canned foods. He thought about how Ladislao would be mourning. Alistar's parents would be mourning. Silver's mother would be mourning. How his friends and pseudo-family would be mourning if he died. Could he do that to them? Could he die?

Finishing the food, he went and took a piss.

Then, he drank some water—having two bottles left after taking Silver's and Alistar's.

Silver had two hair-ties on him that Harry thought Silver wouldn't mind Harry borrowing. To distract himself, he thought about how Imelda and Malia braided their hairs over the last two weeks of knowing them. How Ginny would braid his hair and how Than said he liked the causal braid in Harry's hair. That it made him look like a warrior. Grabbing some of his long curls, he began to mimic what he saw and felt. It comforted him as he held the small thick braid between his two fingers. Sliding it behind his ear, it stayed. Then with the other hair-tie, he put his hair up into a high ponytail. He played with the braid and hoped he looked better than a wounded soldier on live television. More like a dangerous warrior.

Faintly hearing a startling noise, he glanced up to the roof of the floor.

Then, he heard the familiar voice. "The prisoners of the basement have escaped." Then, Harry realised why the arena reminded him of a prison so much. "Being caught in their grasp will only result in death.

Do not be caught. And may the odds be ever in your favour."

Standing up instantaneously, he began to pace. The prisoners of the *basement* have escaped. Harry was on the fourth floor. The prisoners, however many there were, would go after the nearest tributes first. That meant the tributes outside of the prison; Rex, District 6's girl. And closest to the ground floor; Susan, Ladislao—*him*. Harry would have the highest chance of survival if somehow he was able to get to the top floor or the roof of the building.

With a higher urgency, he began to look for the stairs for the upper floor. He needed to get to higher ground immediately or else he would have less time trying to evade the prisoners. This was what he predicted would happen. Something that would connect all the tributes together. Harry wondered if they were mutts or real prisoners coming to attack them. He would have to find out as he hurried his search. If they were anything like the Careers, they would be brutal. Murderous. Unforgiving. Harry wouldn't be over them, kissing their foreheads goodbye.

He wouldn't have the upper hand.

Fuck, this wasn't going to go well.

Andromeda walked into the records store with Ted.

Dean, the man always behind the counter, greeted the two of them as they came in. Over the loud head speaker, the sound of a beautiful man's raspy voice began to sing an upbeat tune that through practice Andromeda could recognise came from the Districts. Andromeda gave Dean a soft smug expression as she came over to him. "Who's the band on the speaker?"

The clerk gave Andromeda a knowing expression as if he expected her to say this. Ted had her hand in his as Dean held his finger up to them and bobbed underneath the counter to grab the album. Whilst he was out of sight, Ted gave Andromeda a passionate kiss and she blushed as Ted wrapped an arm around her waist. When Dean popped back up, he gave Andromeda three albums. "I was looking in the back the other day and discovered these records. They're from District 12 and I thought they were so special looking I had to show them to you."

"The Marauders?" Andromeda peered at the title.

“That’s their name apparently. They're quite big and secretive.”

“Rebels, you think?”

Dean hummed, shrugging his shoulders as if he was undecided about that. “Unlike the Fayes, the Victor Victims, and the Paradise. The Marauders are more upbeat folk. From what I was able to tell, their last album the Capitol ever received was almost seventeen years ago. This,” Dean shows her, “is the first album. Its name is *Lillies*. Actually, I find it dedicated to the girl, Lily, but the other song titles are quite romantic in-the-sense it wasn’t all about her but other people the band were in-love with.”

“Oh?” Ted grabbed the album. “The album’s beautiful. Understandable if it was about love.”

The album cover was a forest green with strikes of what looked like a paint mixture covered on it. Records were interesting because it was seen as retro in the Capitol and a lot of the Capitol was obsessed with the Districts as if their lives were things to be consumed. From different skills one could have, everything had to be shared with the Capitol. That meant music, as well. However, the fact the Marauders weren’t popular was shocking to Andromeda. The male voice sang the words, “*Above all else, nothing in this world is as shocking as you - my love, with your long, soft, curls, and your mighty pearls, nothing in this world is as graceful as you. All the girls love to stare at me, longingly, but all you like to say is your dislike. With your hate, and your debate; on whether I’ll find the one? Oh, darling oh, darling. I think I’ve already found her.*”

“He seems like a die-hard flirt.” Andromeda off-handedly mentioned.

“Well, the song is called ‘Hate me’ so you might be right about that one, Andy.”

“Hah! Really?”

“Listen.”

“*Siri goes on and on about me with you. How I spend less time drinking, and bingeing, and whining to him—but I find that’s because I’m a better person when I’m with you. Oh, Lils. Hate me, punch me, call me a sap. But so long as your eyes are deciding your fate with me, I’ll forever be your scraps. Oh hate me, throw your debates. Let Marls swear and curse me—I’ll be a mess. For your words touch my heart and protect it like my mother’s dress. Lily Evans. You sought out flower. In my eyes, the heavens*

couldn't even touch you with the devils that protect your powers. The diamond to my eye, the only jewel I'll ever need. Except your loving eyes on me."

"*Oh James!*"

The girl, Lily, sounded both cross and amused in the recording. Andromeda instinctively smiled at the audio, knowing that they were deeply in-love. James, from her shout, was a total loser—Andromeda declared. Infatuated beyond belief, it reminded Andromeda of Tom and Harry. How their relationship was deeply rooted in an underlying affection that stemmed from somewhere even Andromeda wasn't able to predict. Lily and James, that sounded right. "They sound beautiful," Andromeda tells Dean. "What album is this song from?"

"The second, despite the first called *Lillies*."

Ted tilted his head, curiously. "What are the other two albums called?"

Dean held up the second album. "This album is titled *D12*. I find it interesting since it obviously is supposed to symbolise District 12 but the contents aren't rebel-like at all. Only the good parts of the District. The Marauders have a lot of influence, I think in the District. The children, in one of the songs, would sing happily and loudly to the lyrics this man *Moony* created."

"And the other?"

"I find this funny but the album is called Son. What is even weirder is that the first song that appears is titled *Harry*."

"Like as in Harry Potter?"

"I don't know." Dean lowers the albums to the two. "But, if Harry appears to look like anything of his father - then I'd say the resemblance is uncanny. And even if Harry isn't the son of Lily and James, then I'd still assume Harry knows who the two are. Their songs are magnificent."

Andromeda looks up from the vinyls. "How much?"

Dean shakes his head. "Don't worry about the price. Capitol kids always come here searching for the most trendy pop-songs out there. This," he points to the three cases, "are something even I'd say are invaluable. For you two," Dean smirks. "They're free. I don't like

putting prices on work that the owners aren't receiving compensation for. But if you find any information on Lily, James, *who this Harry baby is*, Moony, Siri, Marls, come tell me. I'd love to hear about it."

Ted steps closer to the counter. "Is the meeting next Wednesday?"

"Yes," Dean agrees. "You'll both attend?"

Andromeda nods her head alongside her boyfriend. Then, a thought comes to her head. "I was thinking about bringing a person I trusted to the meeting. Do you think that would be allowed?" Dean gave her a hesitant expression, before asking. "How trusted do you think this person is?"

She answers nonchalantly, "he could change the entire world."

Ted and Dean gave her a stern expression, before Dean gave out. "Okay, but—trusted, Andy."

"Of course."

———

Susan shook in fear. *P-prisoners?*

Glancing down the maze of mirrors, she kept hobbling along the line. If they were in the basement, it meant that they were going to come after her and the people outside first. She knew Ladislao and Harry were somewhere above her so that meant that enviable, she would be first to die once the prisoners started to come after them. She gulped, head pounding as her face was covered in blood. Imelda's blood.

Her face looked as if it came out of a horror scene her aunt used to act out. Biting her inner-lip, she panted loudly. Her injuries were slowing her down as she cried because of the pain. Hobbling, unintentionally - she kept falling down. She was so exhausted despite passing out for more than a day. She was so hurt and traumatised, she wanted to die. But—but not like this. Not due to some stupid prisoners. She whimpered, scared.

Then, the hissing began. *"Child…"*

"Smell of child…"

"Blood…"

"Soul…"

“Hungry…”

“Feast…”

“No,” Susan shook her head, sobbing. “No.”

Grabbing her knife, she knew she had no other choice than to fight these prisoners. She kept creeping back towards the other exit of the maze slowly as she faced where the prisoners were going to come out from. They kept repeating bloodthirsty words, mentioning her soul and dinner. *“Feeding the children… dancing the fates… coming all together… feasting on the souls together… food… food—FOOD”* Susan screamed and threw her knife at the first bellow she heard.

She stood shocked as a bony, almost sheet-white, prisoner laid back against the floor with a sword in its hands. “Prisoner Z3, alive?” Questioned the other prisoner who also had a bony, malnourished figure. However, the other prisoner had dark skin that was pasty in the light. As if both prisoners were vampires that never saw light.

The prisoner turned its gaze—Susan was shocked to see that the prisoner only had one eye-ball. The other spot where an eye was supposed to be was completely empty. Noticing the initial shock, the prisoner cackled at her confusion. “Slaves don’t need two eyes, don’t you know that innocent soul?”

Then, the prisoner runs forward at Susan and she puts her hands up to block the attack but instead of feeling the piercing sensation of a weapon — she feels her body heat - heat up incredibly fast. She cries out when her body is engulfed with flames, the prisoner laughing at her misfortune. “*Haha!*” The prisoner jumped up and down as Susan spun and turned her body around, trying to get rid of the flames that burned her body. *Hot—HOT—**HOT***—her mind screamed. She shrieked hysterically, too in-pain to think about what she meant by any of it. “Aren’t you going to join in, Z3?”

Z3 only grunted.

“Don’t tell me a single stab wound is all to take you down?” But the other prisoner only resumes the obnoxious, heartless, sadist laughter. “Kill the girl! Kill the strong! Kill the almighty! Kill the glory!” The prisoner chanted and Susan could feel herself suffocating. Underneath Imelda’s arms, underneath the licks of flames that were insinuating her organs; her throat began to close up. Skin bubbling with burns worse than she—worse than the Capitol could heal.

She was going to die here.

She accepted it; and let herself go.

The less pain she felt, the better.

It was fate.

———

Harry searched forever but he wasn't getting anywhere.

The stairs that led to the fifth floor was deceiving him because every door that was shut, Harry always thought that it was the one to lead him to the right one but of course, it wasn't. No. The game makers must be trolling with him - to venture downstairs - to face Ladislao - to fight the prisoners but no. He was persistent. He was going to find the door to the staircase. Then, the infamous sound of the *cannon* went off signifying the first death after the prisoners were released. Harry speculated who it was as he kicked his leg up against the roller chair that went crashing.

Hissing at the quick movement, Harry clenched the groin joint with his hand. "Fuck!"

"Stupid fucking—motherfucking—itchy-ass—shitty—fucking games," he cursed. "Who is it, huh?—who's fucking dead!" He glared up to the camera in the corner of the rooms. "Hello Game Makers! Hello Trelawney, Head Game Maker for the 7th time in a mother-fucking row! Can you let me know who's dead?"

He was dying to know.

It wasn't as if a Capitol citizen was going to bend to his whims, in spite of his demands. Harry punched a lot of things in the room, pissed off. He found the Hunger Games to be so unfair. Crying and swearing, he destroyed a lot of things in the room due to his internal rage he hadn't been able to let out because people and danger were always around him. All of his disagreements he had towards things the Capitol did made him mad. Livid. Bothered beyond belief that they were letting this happen, but they couldn't even tell him the name of the person who died. The fucking scums. Harry wiped his tears.

Fuck, he was only fucking sixteen. Seventeen in two weeks.

Couldn't they have chosen a better time for him to be picked?—if not ever.

For fuck sakes.

Pissed, and not literally, Harry took all of his stuff and kept walking. And walking. And walking. He wasn't going to stop walking until he found the fifth floor. He struggled all of this way with the 3rd floor. He struggled with killing both Alistar and Silver emotionally. He struggled knowing Imelda was dead. And all he was trying to do now was find the last motherfucking floor entrance. Harry saw red; consumed by rage. He was going to murder the prisoners if it was the last thing he did.

Then, the hologram appeared before him and Harry paused. "*Day 6.*"

From District 2 — Susan Bones.

He felt empty.

From District 3 — Silver Graves.

Fiddling with his braid, he kept walking. They would want him to keep moving. Susan would watch with her fixed eyes and Silver would smile contently. If they died, they died for a reason. Harry told himself. They died for a reason. If Harry was to die, he'd hope he died for a reason so they died for a purpose. Not to be another piece in the games. Not to be martyrs: not to be dead. They were for a cause. A reason. To symbolise why the Hunger Games should be put down, once and forever. For all of the tributes with him, he wouldn't forget them. Not wanting to cement in history what their lives meant (in their deaths), and not what they struggled to live for.

Their names wouldn't die here. Not in the Games.

They would live.

Harry would make sure of it.

Blinking at the closed door, he didn't have hopes for this to be the door the staircase was behind but when he opened the door he was surprised. The staircase laid there untouched as he stepped further into the room. Harry bit his bottom lip. It was now or never, he told himself. This was what he was searching for. Where he was going to wait out the 74th Hunger Games and fight to the death. Harry began to climb up the stairs, smelling something fresh. Like the flowers

Abele used to collect in the forest. Like the bread Molly used to make. Like the smell of books Hermione was surrounded by. Like the smell of sweets, like the Twins. Like the smell of Him.

Harry felt drowsy at the feeling.

Touched in his heart, as if something warm was curling around his chest. Stepping more into the room, wanting to be consumed by the smell; the feeling; the sensation; Harry didn't realise what was happening by the time he collapsed and he was curled up on the floor. District 12 had its forest that was locked off to them. But the fence that locked District 12 in was hardly ever on. Harry used to sneak out with Fred, George, Ron, Hermione, Ginny. He used to sneak out with Than, Abele, Sibyl. He used to sneak out with Sirius. Harry used to go there by himself.

There was a house by the river where people from the different districts would run away and find. Harry met a couple. A few of them were older men and women. It was in the summer after the horrible hunger games that Millicent Bulstrode won where it was all in the spider forest. Harry was by himself and searching for herbs when he found the house again, and met the people.

Most of them were from District 8. The other three were from District 5.

They were searching for District 13 but needed to stock up on supplies before the winter came and they froze to death. Harry was happy to assist them on their journey but was content in staying at 12. There were two children. One girl and one boy. She was 6 and loved sweet things. Harry returned from 12 with sweets for her. He was 2. The toddler loved to be held so Harry would cuddle up to him and tell him stories as he brought back warm knitted clothes Molly made for him for the boy and girl. But it wasn't only the children who were appealed to him.

A few were older teenagers. Harry never asked for their ages but he had a lot of fun with them. Two couples were young parents to the two children, but the others were old enough for Harry to find attraction to them. Never nervous but still new to the whole sex thing, he asked one of the hotter guys if any of the men were partially attracted to men—and it started this whole thing.

However, only three of the guys got serious with him.

Harry never knew their names but he didn't think they ever knew his

name either. No one did. They would call him their own endearing terms like sweetheart, darling, and pearl. Pearl. The name rang in Harry's head abruptly. And he knitted his eyebrows like that meant something to him. He didn't know a Pearl. He was pearl. Who was he kidding?

Only one woman got physical with him and she liked to call him baby. They would caress Harry's head, kissing his chubby cheeks, his neck, his body, in-between his thighs—back then, Harry had a horrible issue. Anyone who showed him any inch of affection he bent to their wills. It was only until then, he realised he would let anyone who was attractive and skillful with their words open him up. Harry would moan and groan; and let them do anything they liked to him. But he was also a horny teenager who didn't know anything better. The women treated him affectionately and roughly like he imagined back then a mother would; Harry craved the sensation. The men treated him as if he was their everything; something precious; fragile, and innocent.

Harry could be all of those things, but innocent.

He grew mad.

He knew he was addicted to feeling in-love with, even if it meant that they could treat him however they felt like, but he craved the hurt. He craved being lesser than. Harry craved being a thing to want; being a thing to love; being a person worthy of hurting; loving; feeling. All of those people taught different things. Control, obedience, acceptance—pain, disgust, loathing.

Harry cried against one of the men's chests.

He wiped his tears away and called him baby. "Baby, what's wrong?"

And Harry hated that he craved the endearments.

"I-I—I'm sad," he cried, no better than a fourteen year-old boy could manage.

"Oh," he parted his lips, tilting his head. "Why are you sad?"

The man moved one of his arms around his hips and the other around his arse. Harry had both of his arms swung around his neck, leaning his chin into his collarbones. He was held but it made Harry only feel worse. He got kissed on the cheek. It made him feel empty. Deserted. "I—I don't know. It's just," he sniffled and the man stroked a circle

into the malleable skin around his arse. The man covered his face with kisses; trying to distract him from his problems. “I feel like you guys are bad people.”

“Mhm?” He raised his eyebrow at him. Harry thought he was gorgeous, and hated that thought. “The Capitol are the bad people, sweetheart. What makes you think I’m a bad person?”

Harry shrugs his shoulders, upset. “I don’t think you’re evil. I just don’t think you see me for me.”

“And what are you gettin’ at that, sweets?”

“I-I—I don’t think you see me as human.”

“Mhm?”

They were both very drunk.

Harry also knew that was part of the problem. His sex addiction, on top of the alcohol they always had lying around. His insecurities and internal problems wanting to be loved. The man pressed his lips up against the crown of his forehead. “Perhaps we’re bad people. I don’t think anyone’s real good, you know, babes. You and me. You. Me. We are both selfish. Everyone at Camp’s selfish. We want things; we desire things. But you’re wrong. I do see you as human, baby. I see you as human as I see myself. We’re both pieces of shit, and neither of us deserve the things we receive. If you’re sad, I’m sad. If you’re sad, those fuckin’ kids are sobbin’ the bloody creatures. If you’re sad, the world is crying. Baby, know that what you feel is what everyone feels.”

He shivered against his chest, feeling the erection the man was gaining. “Luckily, you’re young enough to know what in this world makes people feel good.”

He mouths at his neck and moves his hands down further until Harry is crying out due to a different kind of pain. A better pain. Something that kicked his adrenaline and fed into the little voice that told him he wasn’t loved. The voice never left. It was always there, at the back of his mind, always telling him that he never deserved the things he received. The goodness. But also the bad. Harry was familiar with pain because he grew up with it. He was born with pain in his veins, in his DNA, and Harry always thought that this was it. This was what he deserved.

That *that* man was right. He was sad but he had to get over it. So was everyone else.

But—his mind, it chewed at him.

He—he wasn't. It—it wasn't normal.

He—he wasn't right.

Right?

Harry kissed Than, lowering himself deeper down his chest. Than moaned and winced around his lips, his tongue. Back then, all he thought of was pleasuring Than. That it was what he deserved. All the goodness Harry could provide to make him feel loved and desired. He blinked, confused. Those men, and women; they were lonesome. They were strangers to each other. Some from District 8, some from District 5. They weren't going to get along. They had one sole goal though. To get to District 13. The forgotten District. The bombed District. Harry wasn't heading there. One of the men asked if he wanted to come, but he declined. He watched as they went on their merry way. Harry knew they were selfish and that he was selfish but he was giving in at that moment.

Than pulled him back up into a passionate kiss. "Gosh, *I love you*—Harry."

"L-love?" He asked, startled.

The teenager laughed at him as he looked like deer in headlights. "Of course, dummy." He wrapped both arms around Harry like he once did to the man, and pulled him back in for a kiss. "What's not to love about you?—You're *you*." Harry cried, he thought back then. The voice dimmed. The one that said he deserved all the pain in the world. He believed for a moment that Than's words were the truth and, for once, he understood. Sex and love were correlated because of the memories shared between two people. Not only a means for an end.

Harry liked making his partners feel good. His partners liked making him feel good. *Harry*.

The summer of '45 was a lesson, an experience.

Inexperienced, and his desire to be loved however a person would let him—he let himself give up control so he wouldn't have to think about the bad things. Harry was drunk on the touch. The sensation of

burning at the seams. Opening up to people who he thought would understand him. He was giddy over the feeling not because he was infatuated or embarrassed but because for once, in his life, he understood the feeling of manipulation and Harry was freaked out over it. The power someone could have during sex that made him feel weak. That fed the voice that he was weak and deserving of pain.

What taught him the lessons that Sirius didn't.

That sex could be weaponised to get what you want.

And why Harry didn't touch Tom; he didn't want anything from him.

Tom was enough.

He didn't need to be touched or cherished to know that.

Just talking with him, falling deeply interconnected and a sense of belonging with Tom made Harry understand what it meant to be in-love with someone. Love someone beyond what they could offer him. Beyond what his self-taught lessons on sex meant. It didn't surprise Harry in the slightest that it was Tom that caused him to feel all of this, however. He knew why; it was Tom. And that was enough for him to inherently know why.

Harry felt soft, but not weak.

He felt strong, powerful, loved.

Even if sometimes he couldn't help but believe the opposite.

Tom was panicking.

Due to the sleep-inducing smoke that was on the fifth floor, it was the worst possible floor for Harry to enter whilst the prisoners were let loose. He watched the teenager as he curled in on himself like a frightened child, knees to his chest as he slept on his side. Harry appeared adorable to the Capitol like this but Tom knew better; he was thinking some of his worst fears. It's what the gas induced. It fed on fears and insecurities like a drug. No one wanted to ever wake up from it once in its slump. Tom turned to Remus. "You need to get him another sponsor. A water balloon that pops over him or something; a gas mask. Come on."

Remus was nervous at the sleeping Harry. “Who can I ask for that?”

Francisca pointed at a sponsor. “Mrs. Crosby could possibly get you the water balloon?”

“Who could get me a gas mask?” Remus turned to her, curious and desperate.

She shrugged her shoulders, nervous. “I don’t know about that one.”

“Cuttings or Bend, probably.” Tom bit his inner-cheek, mumbling. “Although, they’re hard to convince and hardly ever put money forward in the games. And they’re Career apologists. I don’t think they would bend to the whims of Harry’s life.”

Francisca stands, shaky. “Let’s think. Bronson might.”

“Unlikely, not after the scandal last year.”

“*Might*, Tom. I said, *might*.”

“Okay, I apologise—it’s just that I’m—“

“We know,” Remus told him.

Tom wasn’t able to think properly. Harry had about almost a day of being asleep before the prisoners would catch up to him. He was unable to stay still on his seat at the prospect. The teenager kept on thinking. Bronson might not want to deal with Remus after the scandal last year but he might with Tom. But Tom couldn’t do that. He wasn’t a victor. He couldn’t meddle with sponsorships. Dumbledore told him not to. It wasn’t something he was allowed to do. He thought about Cuttings and Bend. They would have the better materials but definitely wouldn’t want to help Harry regardless of his status as top four alive.

Actually, no Careers were alive. Susan was the last one.

District 6. District 10. District 11. District 12; were the only ones alive.

Tom turned to where Bronson was sitting and drinking with his other sponsorship associates. Francisca gave him a harsh expression but sliding out of his bar chair, Remus’ eyes following him—he asked Francisca what he was doing. Francisca ignored him as Tom strode up to Bronson’s table. Gulping and tugging on his tie as if he meant business, Tom took a deep breath to calm himself before planting a

calculated smirk on his face. “Hello, Mr. Bronson.”

The man turned his head at Tom. “Oh, Mr. Riddle. What a surprise to see you here!”

Another associate patted his spot beside him. “Oh, do come sit, Mr. Riddle. The games are becoming ever-the more interesting now that District 12’s boy is out.”

He gritted his teeth and barred a dangerous smile. “Of course.”

Choosing to sit between Bronson and his associate, he turned to Bronson. “So Mr. Bronson. I was interested to hear what you are doing after last year’s hiccup.” The man gave him a calculated expression as Tom widened his own grin but kept his eyes as sharp as ever. “Additionally, I was wondering if you could strike a sponsorship deal with me.”

Bronson’s eyes went wide and the associates’ mouths fell agape. “A sponsorship deal with you—Mr. Riddle. You aren’t a victor.”

“No,” he dims his smile, understandingly. “I know. But unfortunately, District 12’s sole victor is a bit incapable of assisting with his remaining tribute so I felt obliged to pick up the slack. A personal project the President has sent for me before I become the President once I’m eighteen this December. You understand, correct?”

“Oh no,” Bronson shook his head. “Do tell me more about your… personal project though.”

Then, pulling the biggest bull-shitty story out of his ass, Tom relayed. “Yes, well. If you could imagine, the President himself went through something similar when he was younger. Before he was even President.” This wasn’t a lie, but it helped build on Tom’s. “Ask him and he will tell you that he was associated with the games. Game maker for a couple of years. As a result, I’ve been thinking for the past year to become more involved and work on my own personal project. Being a mentor for a random District which happened to be District 12. I… I do need to say though, that being Remus Lupin’s partner has been harsh—and it was unfortunate, Sedge Pines perished so early. However, I want to succeed in my project. Proving I’m a calculated successor for the President. However, I need him—“ he pointed to Harry who was asleep on the screen. “To live.”

“Either you cannot help me or I will go away.”

“Oh,” Bronson tilted his head in interest. “I surely don’t want that to happen. Stay. I’ll assist.”

“At what price?”

“Dear,” Bronson gave him a knowing expression. “With you, my reputation will mend itself.”

No sex—no sex—no sex—

“I don’t want anything physically, only to be your friend.” He tells Tom. “You fix people’s reputations as much as you can break them. You are one of a kind, my friend.”

The associates laugh but all Tom can do is sigh at the fact, he won’t have to have sex with the plump man. The man who seems to be anything but considerate. Striking the deal and returning with the sponsorship for *his boy*, Remus ruffles his hair which surprises Tom completely. It takes him off-guard. “Great work, kid!”

Tom squeaks before he is kissed on the cheek by Francisca. “Congratulations, Tom.”

“What convinced him?” Remus asked him, excited almost like a young boy.

“I told him that it was a personal pet project Dumbledore told me to conduct; like he once did; and that District 12 was the random district picked and that I had to help Harry because I got no assistance from you, apologise for throwing you underneath the bus like that.” Tom scratched his neck with nerves. Remus told him not to sweat it; a District phrase. Tom felt weird at his enthusiastic attitude. It was nothing like the drunk-beat Remus Lupin everyone knew.

Francisca told Remus that he should try and convince Crosby to get them a water balloon. Not like it cost much, but people had specific things they had already sponsored for. It was business. After Remus left, Francisca smirked beside Tom. “Warming up to the victor?”

“I find him weird,” he answered honestly.

“Personally, I find it endearing. This is him when he isn’t drunk.”

Francisca watches Remus’ interaction with Crosby like hawk. “Thoughts?”

“He’s handling sobriety much easier than I suspected.”

“People handle things better especially when they are weaned off the things they were once addicted to.” That was news to Tom. Tom thought Remus was doing complete sobriety but thought Francisca’s comment made a lot of sense. They wouldn’t have had him sane in time to sponsor Harry gifts through the Hunger Games. They needed to wean him; it was their only choice of a sane, Remus Lupin.

“So kind-of drunk?”

“I’ve calculated his doses. A drink around morning, no drinks at lunch. And a drink at dinner.”

“Two drinks per day?”

“The best I could do was keep him happy and sober.”

“Alright, if that’s the best we could do.”

On the television screen, they watched as the prisoners C7 and Z3 ran back downstairs. The other prisoners were waiting there to see what information they brought back as C7 told them that only two were left alive in the building and two were outside. That they were going to split up. C7, Z3, R5, and K8 were going to take down the maze whilst T1 and U9 took care of everyone inside of the prison. Watching as C7, Z3—ran far back behind them, R5, and K8 took off into the maze. C7 setting the maze on fire, burning it all down to the ground.

Tom gulped, watching as T1 and U9 turned back to the inside of the prison. This was their territory if their expressions were anything to go by. These were going to be the prisoners Harry would have to face. Ladislao. They ran upstairs, T1 with its axe, and U9 with its bat made the feat of running quickly. Possessed. As if someone else had their souls and were toying with them. Tom turned his gaze back to Harry who was sleeping whilst the rest of the tributes were fighting for their lives. *Oh, Harry—what type of fuckery have you got yourself in now?*

Remus came back with a sponsor.

They compiled the sponsorship package together with the game makers as Tom constructed what the gift was going to look like. A balloon that splashed on top of Harry that spawned into the arena, and wet him so that he would wake up. Then, he would get a gift that had a gas mask inside of it with the note: ***“Don’t sleep anymore, dummy — T.”*** And for him to make his way to the top of the map

where he would have the strongest chance at survival but due to the requests the other three Districts were putting into their tributes, it was a horrendous wait.

Tom nibbled on his bottom lip.

Everyone needed to hurry the fuck up.

Harry didn't have this time to spare.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter Title: I Did Something Bad
Memorable Lyrics
"I never trust a narcissist but they love me"
"So I play 'em like a violin, and I make it look, oh, so easy"
"Cause for every lie I tell them - they tell me three"
"This is how the world works - now all he thinks about is me"
"I can feel the flames on my skin - crimson red paint on my lips"
"If a man talks shit, then I owe him nothing - I don't regret it one bit, 'cause he had it coming"
"They say I did something bad then why's it feel so good?"
"They say I did something bad but why's it feel so good?"
"Most fun I ever had, and I'd do it over and over and over again if I could"
"It just felt so good, good"

I mean, the entire song captures the essence of Harry x Tom (against other people) by yk.
Alternative Chapter Title: Start a War by Klergy, Valerie Broussard
I'm not actually sleep deprived right now so a longer chapter note! :)
Word Count: like 7k or something

Thanks peps for 1700 hits! and the subs and 47 kudos
I really appreciate y
Let me know what you think about the story in the comments, or your feelings about it
It makes me think
Up next, hoax
P S

Out of the Woods

Chapter Notes

Posted: 7th of March, 2024
Sorry for the late update, I had studying to do

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Andromeda was horrified at the prisoner mutt-looking creatures.

The one with the flame-thrower began to burn down the entire thorn-forest. Her features were stern when Rex Watts was found. The prisoner who found him screeched for assistance but Rex was able to hold the prisoner off with his trident. Stabbing the prisoner over and over again, Andromeda felt pride for the District 11 tribute. Then, K8 and C7 come running towards where the two were fighting. She bit her bottom lip, anxious. Ted had his arms wrapped around her stomach as he laid his head against her shoulder. “The girl from District 6 might win this year.”

“No she won’t, but she could’ve if—“ Andromeda pointed to Harry “—he wasn’t in the running.”

“What makes him so special?”

Andromeda eyed her boyfriend.

He didn’t understand the importance of Tom or Harry. How their set of skills were useful to both sides of the war if they got trapped on each. If Tom and Harry stayed on the Capitol’s side, it was over for the rebels. If Tom and Harry stayed on the District’s side, it was over for the Capitol. That was how powerful they were together. It was difficult to predict what would happen if one or the other stayed on the same side they were on now; or opposite sides but whatever happened. It would be detrimental to the outcome of the war.

If Andromeda was able to convince Tom that the District’s were going to have the final positive outcome and not the Capitol, and for Tom to be beside Harry’s side throughout the entire war; then, he’d most certainly pick—not just anyone’s side but Harry’s. That would help him keep sane if Harry was by side. It was necessary for Tom to see this or else they might lose.

Ted got stared down by his girlfriend.

“He’s special because the future lies on his and my trusted-friend’s shoulders.”

“Who was this trusted friend, you told Dean you had?”

She shook her head. “I can’t tell, not yet; but you’ll know soon enough.”

Ted gave Andromeda a calculated expression but dropped the topic.

C7 began to use its flamethrower to destroy the area that surrounded Rex. K8 ran forward, dodging the trident and toppled Rex over, grabbing his mouth and throat; strangling him. The teenager choked and began to try and fight back. It was a bad idea as C7 came over, beginning to burn Rex alive as it did to Susan. Fighting back but unable to move from the ground, Rex screamed and cried out in pain. On the other camera, it showed T1 and U9 scrambling through the mirror maze like their lives depended on murdering the tributes. Andromeda began to wipe her tears away from Rex. He tried to put himself out of the flames but the mutts kept going. She had to turn away, Ted telling her that everything was going to be alright but Andromeda knew that if only the revolution came a bit earlier - he wouldn’t have to die this soon. None of them would have to.

The cannon fired and Andromeda was glad he was dead.

He no longer had to feel the pain of being burned alive as the four mutts regrouped. C7, K8, Z3, and R5 all slowly band together to come up with a strategy. They mimicked humans to a tea as C7 kept burning down the maze as K8 went in one direction, Z3 in the other, and R5 in the least likest direction of the tribute. Andromeda watched as T1 and U9 ran up the stairs to Floor 2. Ladislao was hiding in a corner of the floor, and he was crying to himself.

The teenager looked atrocious.

With dark circles underneath his eyes, pale sickly skin, messy hair, his shaky body, and terrified expression—he wasn’t doing well. Hearing Imelda’s cannon and her image on the hologram would’ve terrified him. He had a weapon in his hand, pointing it towards the only door in the room. It wasn’t the smartest option to be in the corner room of the floor, Andromeda thought to herself, but all things considered he was blind in one eye. Having a simple target to focus his attention to would help him be able to fight the mutts if he had the energy to.

But the way Ladislao was appearing, he could barely stand.

It was eerily silent as the two prisoners climbed up the stairs to the second floor. Sniffing around, looking for the scent of blood or the smell of their searched tribute, they stepped over Valor's perished body they had yet to remove this year for abnormal reasons and separated. Since Ladislao had been all over the place on the second floor, his scent was more powerful in some areas than others. T1 headed over to the campground the trio had created earlier on in the Hunger Games and U9 went to where Ladislao came up from the tube.

Ladislao noticed the break in sound around where he was hiding, nervously deciding he was going to make a break for it if they came inside of the room. Andromeda watched as they confused themselves by running around the entire place without finding the teenager. However, Ladislao was covered in Imelda's jacket so that must be hoarding the scent of him off his area because they weren't looking for Imelda; him.

Then, T1 got closer to where Ladislao was hiding in the corner of the floor. It smelt his scent.

Creeping closer to the door where he was, T1 screeched to let U9 know where it was. Then, it went in, but hearing the screech from T1 —Ladislao threw his knife at his head—breaking it in two. Andromeda cheered for the teenager as he dashed outside the door, grabbing his knife on the way but U9 was dashing after him. Ladislao wasn't able to run for long before U9 caught him. U9 threw its own bat at him, which made Ladislao trip and U9 grabbed his bat and kept smashing his head in. Andromeda was horrified as Ladislao screamed for help.

"Imelda! Harry!—Harry!—Where are you?!—AHH—"

"MA! MA—"

An unhealthy crunch silenced Ladislao.

The cannon went off and it was down to the last two tributes. District 6's girl who was hiding and running away from the fire, and Harry who was… probably the most pathetic of all the tributes in the last eight. Imelda was dead; fought Susan to death. Alistar was dead; due to injuries. Silver was dead; due to injuries. Susan was dead; burned to death by the prisoners. Rex was dead; burned to death by the prisoners. Ladislao was dead; head smashed apart. District 6's girl was running for her life whilst Harry was dead asleep. Andromeda bore her eyes at the teenager on the screen. It was obviously the gas in the room that made Harry pass out but… come on, she thought, it was the

final stretch—no need to be asleep. The mutts were sure to get him before District 6's girl if he stayed asleep like this.

T1 and U9 began to run up the stairs. T1 seemed to have no regeneration powers by any sort, but the ability to ignore pain as the split between its head was large and not healing. They headed up the third floor and found themselves chopping away at the poisonous vines. Luckily, Harry was on the fifth floor and not the fourth or else he would be in even more trouble. She bit her bottom lip, hoping for something to snap him out of his.

His cheeks were red and his eyes were tight as if he was having a nightmare.

It would make sense; the gas would do that to anyone in its path.

Harry drooled and Ted touched Andromeda's shoulder. "He should be okay."

"What makes you so sure of that, Ted? He's asleep."

"Look at her," he gestures his head at the District 6 girl. "She has wounds all over her body from nicking the thorns. Additionally, she appears to be malnourished because she didn't get a lot of the supplies from her arena at the beginning. She got up and ran, love." He touched Andromeda's cheek. "Harry's fed and once he wakes up, he will be well-rested. Additionally, he's not as injured as he once was and looks as if he could fight against the two prisoners. One has its head split in the middle, and they both look as if they could fall apart at any moment. So long as he gets to the roof, he should be fine."

The roof…

Andromeda stands up and grabs her phone from the end of the bed. Dialling a number that she exchanged with two days prior, she put her phone against her ear as she went outside on Ted's balcony. Leaning against the railing, Tom picked up. "Harry needs to get to the roof."

"Yes, that would be the most reasonable option." He agreed.

"No, I mean that he can use the roof to his advantage."

"Gravity," Tom supplies.

"Stop being such an ass." Andromeda commented, holding a hand to her forehead, anxiously. "But yes, entirely. The gravity rules would

still be inside of the arena. If Harry somehow manages to hurl them off the roof; he'll have enough time inside of the building to hold off before District 6's girl gets killed." Tom agreed but he said nothing besides that. Andromeda wanted to hear more from him due to her nerves. She wanted to know if he had a plan. "The sponsorship gift. Have you already written a note for it?"

"I'm writing it."

"Write, trap yourself on the roof. That way, he could box himself in but once it becomes enviable that the doors will open—the message is still clear. Stay on the roof." Tom thanks her before she hears the scribbles of a pen on the other side of the line. She says, "last two. He's almost home."

"Against a District 6 girl, nonetheless," Tom's voice is light. He sounded relieved.

"Malnourished and exhausted. She won't be able to run forever."

Tom hands the note to the person on the other side of the line and speaks to them for a while before turning his attention back to Andromeda as he begins to walk away. Andromeda realises that the sponsorship was about to be sent as she rushed inside to see it happen. Before she entered the bedroom, though, she asked. "Have any more thoughts about your future, Tom? I won't be able to reply so just talk. I'll hum my agreement or keep silent due to my disagreement."

"Alright," he tells her, the sound of his heels kicking against the marble pausing.

Andromeda jumped back into the bed as he watched Harry. She thought that Tom was doing the same somewhere amongst the hideous stormy weather. Ted gave her a confused expression but she shushed him and pointed back to the screen. The sponsorship gift appeared from the roof of the building and popped on top of Harry, who was startled alive due to the cold water. The sponsor's gift laid out in front of him as he opened the gift, expressing his confusion. "What had just happened…" he whispered to himself. Then, he saw the mask inside with Tom's message.

He lifted the card. "Trap yourself on the roof?"

Then, he glanced up to see the gas. He blinked dazedly before putting the mask back on but Harry laid on his back, seemingless exhausted from the experience he was under when the drugs were through his

system. “This sucks,” he groaned as he rubbed his eyes. Then, he began to slowly come to himself as the prisoners were close to making their way to the fourth floor. Andromeda wanted Harry to hurry the fuck up but Tom answered.

“Harry doesn’t know that Ladislao is dead. He thinks both Rex and Ladislao are still alive.”

Andromeda hummed, tucking a curl behind her ear as she leaned back against the pillows on the bed. Tom was calculated with what he said. “Harry is stubborn and a force of nature. No matter what he does, he’s going to end up choosing his District over the Capitol; which means me. If what you say is correct, and that I’m going to have to do the decision-making on whether or not I want to stay with him…” Tom takes a deep breath. “I’d rather stay with him.”

She smirks, turning to Ted and nodding her head happily at him.

Andromeda agreed.

“What do you have in mind for me joining the two of you?—Additionally, does this make me a rebel?” Tom questions softly, as if he didn’t want people to overhear him. Andromeda answers, “there is this meeting that we’re attending that is us breaking away from the Capitol but in the most self-sufficient and meaningful way as possible without the Capitol turning to complete blown war at first, but… if you want to join; it means that is no longer possible. It is a full-blown war. However,” she smiles at the screen as Harry begins to hobble through the fifth floor, “it does mean you’re a traitor. A rebels’ title comes when you’ve actually done something to defy the Capitol.”

Tom is silent for a moment. “My entire existence defying the Capitol like this would fit the category.”

“Then, welcome to the club, Tom Riddle.”

Ted’s eyes went wide at Andromeda’s declaration.

“Meet us underground, underneath at Tooker Park at nine o’clock on Wednesday.”

“Like the Underground?”

“Get used to it, coddled boy.”

She ends the phone call and Ted gapes at her. Then, he takes her two

hands—one that has her phone in it, and breathes before he questions her. “Why were you talking to the President’s successor about our meeting? Additionally, why—what—how—Andy, you’ve got to explain everything about why you’d say that to him.” She wets her lips as she tries to think of the best introduction to explaining Tom and Harry’s relationship. She can’t think of an easy way of explaining them so she sighs.

Pointing at Harry, she begins. “Both Harry Potter and Tom Riddle are both equally infatuated with each other.” Ted’s eyes widened. “Tom; I’m taking a predicted guess here, has been spending the past week trying to get sponsors for him. And the week before that was helping assist Harry at getting high training scores, allies, a reputation in the Capitol they’d love.” She detaches her arms from Ted’s. “Tom and Harry are sickly in-love, it’s a bit nauseating, I’ll have you know about the way they both talk about each other. That main beau Harry was talking about was Tom. Tom can’t talk about Harry without turning bright red. It’s ridiculous and sweet but most importantly. Detrimental to the war.”

“As Dumbledore’s successor, if Tom betrays the Capitol; it means something is wrong with it. If he was to commit a betrayal so great. And,” Andromeda gestures to the phone, “he said he would do it. For Harry. Now,” she smirks at him. “Harry isn’t going to hop on the Capitol’s train after this; he’s going to ally himself with his District because he doesn’t want the Hunger Games to continue. Like us, after going through it himself, but he’ll also have Tom there with him which roots picking the lesser side because of love. Now, what is more powerful than love?”

“Hope. Exactly. Terror is on the other side of the spectrum.”

“You’re saying that you think they’ll change the entire tides of the war.”

“I don’t think; I know, Ted.”

“Alright…”

“And I know that together, they’ll be even more deadly than any of the traps the Capitol could throw at us. Tom is more knowledgeable with everything, like we are compared to the Districts. We have the training; I’m becoming a doctor so I’m able to heal people better. You’re becoming a Peacekeeper; so you’re able to know the inner-works of the Capitol’s weaponry. But what’s even more powerful than

us, is Tom. Grown and raised in the centre of the Capitol; amongst the top-secret information about what Dumbledore plans to do and create - what secrets Dumbledore knows about us - everything; Tom knows Dumbledore the best out of all of us. And what's better than using that to take down the man who created this?"

"He's our greatest weapon."

"Yes, and he doesn't realise it because he's so love-sick for him. A District boy."

"… is it right to use him like this Andy?—It sounds wrong."

Andromeda gives her boyfriend a harsh expression. "Tom knows the consequences of what happens if he chooses the Capitol instead of Harry. He knows the enviable. Tom is one of the smartest people I've ever met. He isn't going to pick the losing side of the war unless it meant being with Harry. But in spite of this, the war is on equal footing. These two people are the tipping scales; and Tom picked us for him. That means everything."

"And we're still using him though, Andy."

"Think of it like this. He's going to want to contribute everything he has to offer for Harry's safety and his own. Don't worry about us using him, I personally don't care all that much about Tom Riddle. All I care about is you, my sisters, and my parents. I want us alive. Tom wants Harry alive as much as he wants himself alive. We're both contributing to a cause that is using us as much as we're using it. It's… an exchange."

"Alright," he sighs. "But—I… I'm going to talk to him."

"About what?" She asks.

"Don't worry about it Andy. All I think is that he's in such a position of power, alone. What happens if Dumbledore finds out about him before we leave. Before he is able to betray the Capitol. He's in deep-shit then, Andy."

"Then, it's for the cause."

"Andy—"

"He'll find a way out of it."

“But you said—“

“I know what I said, Ted.” She averts her eyes. “Like I told you, he’s not staying anywhere without Harry. He either escapes the Capitol in that situation, kills himself, or kidnaps Harry himself. And all of those options we will be able to counter. Don’t worry about it. He’s only decided now that he will join the war, on our side. We will take the necessary precautions to make sure we get them both alive to 13.”

“If you say so…”

———

Harry hobbled through the gas with his stomach killing him.

He clenched the skin around his stomach’s area and used the wall for support. Harry didn’t know how many tributes were dead. He hadn’t heard a cannon because he was passed out due to the gas, but it meant either four were alive, three, or two were alive since he hadn’t won the games yet. It meant Rex could be dead. It meant District 6’s girl could be dead. It—it meant Ladislao could be dead, but he tried not to concentrate on that. He focused on trying to find the roof Tom suggested getting to.

He nervously stared down at the blood of a taken tribute as Harry glared at the memory. It must’ve been Alistar doing the killings. He kept on moving. Alistar was with them now. There wasn’t any need to think of the dead now. It would only encourage him to die more. Harry kept searching for the staircase when he sat down to eat.

Knowing he didn’t have much time left to do anything of any importance, he ate three canned meals; took a piss; and drank half a bottle of his water. Then, he kept everything of importance and dumped the rest of the unnecessary stuff. He didn’t need the extra weight to hold him back. He thought of the Marauders whenever District 12 was in a sticky-situation; a freezing cold winter, and people needed motivation to stay alive. They would hide together in the large room the Marauders sang and played in, and the children would huddle together and sing and dance. The adults would drink alcohol to keep their bodies fueling them.

The teenagers and young adults would leave District 12 to gather as much wood and food as they could, bringing it back to the shelter and warming everyone they could. They brought wool and materials women and children knitted to create blankets and they could all support each other. The songs usually spoke of hope and their love for

each other burning through all storms. Harry kept thinking about the lyrics as he searched desperately for the roof.

Harry sniffled, feeling sick from the congested air as he glanced around the next room he found himself stumped by. The peacekeepers in 12 let the people sneak out during the winter because they also needed food and items to survive. The Head Peacekeeper, Vim, followed Harry and his friends into the woods so he would be able to help. Nobody snitched on any of them during the winters but once the weather warmed, Vim wouldn't do that again until the next winter. The peacekeepers understood they needed to survive like this so they did nothing to prevent them from suffering more. Harry was grateful for the kindness.

Vim was friendly, the Head Peacekeeper told them stories from when he was back in 4 and 7, back when he was younger before he was booted to 12. This was only during the winter, but his personality sparked when he no longer had to keep up the mean act. He looked after his citizens almost like a real president would. They respected him and exchanged items with him for money. The economy kept blossoming as they found ways around the harsh system in place to keep them from being free.

Back in '45, that summer—Harry was absent for a good portion of it.

Vim asked where he was one day after he decided to go back for good, and Harry cried to him about it. About the people he met. Vim said nothing but listened. Harry didn't know whether he took action to tell the Capitol about the escapees but Vim kept Harry intact during the autumn, winter, and spring that year; and told him that next summer not to get in the same trouble he did the previous summertime.

Harry chose to listen but kept escaping into the forest as it was his escape. Fred, George, Ron, Ginny, and Percy all came with Harry, and so did Hermione and Than; despite their dislike of the breaking of the rules being in the forest led them, but they created maps of the surrounding area of 12. Where to hide, where the river was with the house. The best places to escape quickly if something were to ever happen to 12. Harry glared at the doors in front of him. He needed to find the quickest way to the roof to avoid awful things happening to him, he needed to think and quickly. He kept beginning to quicken the pace.

District 12 was lively; and at the same time, boring.

School was boring.

A lot of the things they learnt at school were bullshit propaganda fed to them by the Capitol because when Harry was younger, in the Capitol, he was told and learnt all the lies they fed to the Districts. Both Tom and Harry learnt and they were clever with retaining their memories. So Harry accepted that this was what they would be told, but said differently to the children who first learnt it. Harry made sure that the kids of the school knew that there were more things to life than the Hunger Games. One time, he brought back a wild cat from the forest and domesticated it; and it became known as “Nettle.”

Nettle was a kitten and so wild; Harry got like a thousand scratches from the cat, trying his best to domesticate it and in the end, he did. But it took a while for Nettle to get there, along with a thousand cuts. But he took the scars as a memory for the effort he put in for the kids. Nettle was taken care of around 12 and loved the Marauder’s bar during rainy days where the kids would be. The fluffy cat was pat and brushed, the Peacekeepers even allowed Nettle to be in their classes. Harry liked to show to the kids what goodness in the world could do to someone - and how people trusted others more when mutual trust was bonded.

The kids liked to call him a multitude of names. From being called an uncle, to father, to brother, to any name on the planet. He was called. They usually liked to call him brother, though, as he was acting like their big brother. The children began to learn various things from him depending on what they were best at. Like medicines; or hunting; or supporting others; or finding out better ways to insulate houses; or best help out the shops in 12; or play music alongside the Marauders. The skills he taught were various since he had various.

However, he said there were always things to do and help extend their own skills. And that by doing so, trust is formed, and another way of exchange becomes more accessible to you. Harry kept running around the fifth floor until eventually, he found the fifth floor’s exit. The stairs to the roof that seemed to be blocked off by chains. Grabbing his knife, he began to use all of his arm strength to destroy the chains that were interwoven into the door handles. Harry saw light for the first time as the doors had windows. He thought about breaking the windows but thought that would let the prisoners to the roof quicker.

Harry kept hacking the chains as he made progress with one of the metal chains. Then, as soon as it was broken off from the other piece, the entire chain detached from the pressure that was keeping it in

place on the door. The teenager then opened the door to find the roof unaffected by the craziness of the Hunger Games. Grabbing the chain, he brought it to the roof and then went back-downstairs to grab any furniture that he could see would be large enough to keep himself blocked out on the roof for long enough.

He didn't know how many tributes were dead or alive.

Bringing the large couch up the stairs, he gritted his teeth as he lifted it. Then, he slid it through the door and put it on the roof. He went back downstairs to get more things he could lock against the door so they wouldn't be able to get to him immediately. Additionally, he grabbed things that could help him onto the top of the room that the stairs led to before the person could leave the fifth floor. Harry blocked off the windows and cut pieces of his jacket large enough to put them where the windows were so they didn't have a clue about where he was.

From the top of the box, he glanced around the arena to see what it really was; a prison.

And then, he saw the entire forest surrounding the prison burn as the prisoners—malnourished, thin, bony, almost-skeleton-like prisoners ran after tributes with weapons. Harry notices District 6's girl and how she began to run through the forest back into the bowels of the prison. He counted four prisoners chasing after her and declared; it was only the two of them alive. Ladislao was dead. He was next inside the building. Rex is dead. She and he were next, but who would die first?

Harry hoped it wasn't him.

He was freezing as he sat on top of the box.

The furniture was stacked up together on the door, trying to use its weight and gravity to block off anyone from entering. He used what was left he had from the bandages to tie it to the back of the box. Harry watched as the rain began, wetting him and his hair completely, making him colder. He shivered, his jacket no longer of use, and sat there waiting.

He wondered where the prisoners inside would be if they had already killed Ladislao. On either the second or third floor, before he woke up because he didn't hear the cannon. Harry shivered and began to feel his eyes swell up. He felt awful. Keeping the mask on, he used it as facial protection from the rain and any weapons that would get too close to striking him. He waited, and then, finally; the banging began.

Shaking and standing up above the box, he grabbed his knife and threw the rest of his bag on the other side of the box where the prisoners were about to come out of. He had a few of his smaller weapons on his belt-line, ready for use. Hearing the smash of the windows, Harry glanced down at the furniture, waiting for the prisoners to pop up.

With his knife at the ready and the banging continuing, he positioned himself so he would be able to take their heads or limbs off if they got too close to him. Then, the second window was broken through. Harry watched as one arm began to try limb through but he took the entire thing off. Screeching began and wailing, the prisoner retracting itself completely from the window. The banging continued and Harry grabbed one of the smaller knives and the chain, wedging the knife inside of the chain and sticking it between the crack of the door—hoping from keeping it open.

Harry waited, and another limb popped up and he hacked the limb; again and again. The prisoners were screeching and he ignored the sound. The teenager bit his bottom lip which had healed over due to the cream. His eyes watered and Harry watched as an axe appeared from the window and was flinged back at him. Dodging it barely, Harry eyed the axe that landed on the other side of the roof. He narrowed his eyes at it before turning back to the window where a prisoner appeared before his eyes. “Hello, soul.”

Harry ran towards the axe, deciding that if it was no longer in commission it couldn’t be used against him. The prisoner followed him and grabbed onto his back as he jumped off the box, Harry landing on his ankle wrong on the floor. “Fuck!” He screamed.

“Mhm,” the prisoner held onto his back. “You’re delicious.”

Harry crawled forward, ignoring the prisoner that began to bite down hard onto his back and Harry ignored the gruesome split between the prisoner’s head as he grabbed forward and held onto the axe. The prisoner let go of him for a moment, before saying. “That’s mine,” and rushed forward to grab it from him. Harry fought the prisoner and kicked it off of him before throwing the axe to the edge of the building where it was about to fall but the other prisoner alongside the prisoner grabbed it in time. The prisoner that was kicked away from Harry rushed back to him and hugged him, around the neck. “You’re so tasty, such a lively soul.”

The prisoner glanced up to the other prisoner with the axe, he began

to glare at the prisoner around his neck. “U9, don’t you think we could keep him? He’d give us so many more nutrients alive unlike that other sissy baby,” it cackled.

Harry saw red, grabbing the prisoner by the neck and throwing it at the other prisoner. “What did you say?”

“Oh,” the prisoner who landed into the back of the axe the other prisoner was holding, pouted as much as the bony, slim thing could. “You don’t know. That little 10 kid, Lack—Slack—Back—I don’t know. It was a while ago kept screaming out your name and his partners, before we killed him. Honestly, he did give us more of a fight than we originally thought though.”

“And now,” the other prisoner began. “He’s dead.”

The blood on both the axe and the bat terrified him.

It means people have died from it.

Harry kept standing despite how many shards of pain kept nibbling at his ankle. It was completely fucked as he grabbed his large knife. They killed Ladislao. Couldn’t even get his name right even in death. Kept taunting his death as if it meant nothing to no one. It meant something to him, Harry was growing redder and redder. The prisoner who was on his neck previously had a condensing smile that kept growing wider. “Oh no, U9. What should we do? The baby’s mad.”

“Stop taunting him, T1. Just kill him already.”

“But,” he pointed at Harry. “His soul is just so delicious.”

“Which is exactly why he needs to die.”

They gave each other expressions that meant to Harry an entire other conversation was happening, but Harry took that as a time to back up. T1 noticed immediately, moving forward towards him, smug. “Oh don’t run, bunny. We’re not going to hurt you,” he had the axe in his arm - ready to pounce on him. Harry doesn’t think he’s ever been so terrified.

Harry dodged the axe that came his way and began to hobble to the opposite side of the box and U9 chased after him. Harry dipped to the side as he swung at him, Harry slashing his stomach contents as he hobbled away from the prisoner and turning back to T1. T1 got his axe back and began to chase after Harry like he was a rabbit ready to

be skinned for food. He felt like vomiting. Harry began to hurry away from T1 as U9 got up.

Harry yanked U9's bat from him and threw it across the edge of the building. Finally, he got one of the weapons away from them. Tears began to grow in his eyes as he dodged and got slashed by the axe against his cheek, which fortunately had his mask in the way to protect him. Harry landed on the floor and T1 got ready to hit him again when Harry slashed its Achilles tendon, and calf muscle. "Ah fuck," T1 cursed. "You tributes are a serious problem, I hope you know that."

Harry used the box's wall to give him momentum to snatch the axe from his arms. But T1 wrapped his arms around his waist as he began to hurry over to the edge so he could throw it over the side. Harry gritted his teeth and U9 appeared and kicked Harry to the side. Fuck, he cursed, why couldn't these mother-fuckers die?

Landing on his side with T1 against his chest, holding his neck down and squeezing, he cried out.

T1 laughed at his displeasure. "How cute."

Harry began to kick and scream, trying to get T1 off of him when he saw U9 begin to get the axe ready to slash his head down in the middle. He panicked and in his midst of panic, grabbed T1's head and brought it over Harry's to protect him as U9 cracked through T1's head completely. U9 paused and blinked as Harry scattered from underneath T1's arms, and yanked the axe from his head. It was completely dead, the prisoner, as U9 stared at him. Confused. "That wasn't supposed to happen."

"Neither was I," Harry glared at him. "But things happen for a reason."

Using the axe instead of the knife he threw across the edge, he began to chase after U9. U9 did some weird shit, despite this, and began to try and fight him but Harry was much more agile than the six foot five being. He was five foot seven. Small for his age, sixteen, but he was relatively—malnourished for a sixteen year-old despite being able to pack some muscle and traumatised so he supposed it made it good for times like this when he avoided the punches coming for him. Muscle memory, how fantastic. And bothersome.

Then, Harry got the axe yanked from him but instead of U9 using it for himself, it got thrown over the edge. U9 stared at him viciously

with a cunning smile.

“Unlike T1, I don’t like to play with my food.”

“But,” U9 paused. “I do like showing them what happens when they mess with me.”

The battle of fists began as U9 began to punch the shit out of him. Harry landed on his back and U9 rushed forward with the upper arm. Harry flipped over, and moved out of the incoming way, U9 tripping over because of the wet concrete. Then, Harry pounced onto the prisoner who began to bite and yank skin and muscle from his upper left arm. He ignored the pain and kept shitting the fuck out of its face. It no longer had a nose as Harry broke the fuck out of it. Then, he ripped the eyes out of the prisoner. “You little bitch,” the prisoner yanked his hair.

The prisoner winded him as it kicked his chest.

Harry began to have a coughing fit as it punched his eye, Harry feeling shaky.

Standing up, the prisoner took Harry by the throat and began to squeeze like T1 did. But not to the point where all air escaped him. Enough so he knew the pressure and danger was there as Harry coughed heavily. He put a lot of pressure to his jugular as the prisoner fiddled with the vein it could feel underneath its finger. “So lively, T1 was right. I do really want to keep you but I know the Capitol won’t allow me unless you’re dead so I say this is a goodbye.”

U9 began to move and hold Harry high, he began to kick once he got the air in his lungs back, a long fingernail with his other hand piercing his right cheek deeply. Harry screamed, the muscles spasming underneath the pointy nail. He cried, and saw the blood that detracted from his nail as he drew a line across his face and to where the fat no longer met his face.

“You are one of the feistiest tributes I’ve ever seen. Goodbye, Harry.”

The prisoner held him across the edge of the building where they were six floors up. Harry’s eyes went wide and as soon as U9 let go, Harry grabbed his hand and brought U9 down with him. But since U9 was still on the roof, he fell to his knees and began to take Harry’s wrist, squeezing it underneath his hand. Harry felt the veins in his wrist break as the pressure was too strong - Harry wailing as he held on to all he could.

Then, Harry noticed the axe that was attached to the fifth floor's outer wall. Stuck in the concrete. Reaching for the axe as he held on for dear life as U9 broke his elbow, he let go and Harry held onto the concrete. "For goodness sake," U9 sighed. Then, U9 began to get ready to step on his fingers the hardest he could, but before he could do that, Harry reached down and grabbed the axe and lifted it so he could switch what side he was holding on to and use his broken right side to slash his stomach further, but most importantly knocking U9 off-balance.

U9 fell off the roof and tried to bring down Harry with him, but holding onto the edge with his strongest arm in that moment, clenched the axe to his side as it was jammed into the concrete wall, he held himself tightly to the wall. Then, he finally was alone with injuries beyond what he had ever experienced before.

Alone, he pulled himself up the wall with the assistance of the axe that was attached to the side of the building. Once he got up far enough and kicked the axe from the building, it falled down hurriedly, and he laid against the cold, wet concrete as he shook with adrenaline. His veins on his right wrist were bleeding out due to U9; and he clenched it against his chest, horrified. His elbow - and possibly his right arm was broken. He averted his gaze away from that traumatising sight. His vocal cords were beyond strained. Harry knew he couldn't talk; or scream. He felt a pounding headache coming across him as the rain made him increasingly feverish. His upper left arm was bleeding from the skin and partial muscle U9 yanked from him. It kept spasming beside his chest. And his right cheek was bleeding from the damage the prisoner's fingernail did to him. Harry's left ankle was fucked. He couldn't no longer stand. His head was bleeding from his hair being yanked abruptly whilst additionally being smashed against the ground. Harry knew what internal bleeding felt like and from being kicked, knew that he was bleeding out from the inside.

He was dying.

He shivered, crawling ever so slowly towards the furniture he put together to hold the door shut and began to crawl underneath the couch from the heavy, pouring rain. Curling up on himself, he began to warm up and he passed out from the pain. Harry hoped none of the other four prisoners would be able to get him before the other tribute died or else he would never wake up again.

———

Harry Potter won the 74th Annual Hunger Games thirteen minutes later.

District 6's girl, Cress Mildvale was burned to death as C7 began to destroy the entire building.

The mutts (prisoners) all perished after the final tribute alive was recovered and brought to safety.

Tom was worried senselessly, unable to see him as both Narcissa and Bella held him back from leaving the Black's house to go see him. Tom got Francisca to save him and take him to the hospital where Harry would be in surgery. Tom sat there with Francisca in the private waiting room, endlessly frightened and terrified by the wounds the prisoners inflicted onto him on the screen. He wondered if there would be ever-lasting damage but decided that was a stupid question to think about: because of course there would be. Tom would assist Harry in every way that he could. He didn't want him to leave his side ever again, not if he could help it.

Chapter End Notes

Note: after Chapter 18 I'm taking a month hiatus before I'll return to posting.
I'll add the fonts when I feel up to it, after I post the entirety of the fanfic
Thank you for 2000+ hits, the subs, kudos, and bookmarks!! :))
Up next... one of my favourite's, Safe & Sound
P S

Safe & Sound

Chapter Notes

Posted: 10th of March, 2024
I got u girl, here's the next update :)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dr Kulkarni, Dr Abakar, and Dr Hennigar all stood around Harry Potter's fragile body as he was unconscious and hooked up to all the machines he would need to survive. Tom Riddle held onto his left hand and sat by the left side of Harry's bed as the teenager glared at the three doctors. Francisca put a hand on his shoulder to comfort him but Tom wasn't in the mood for anyone to be messing with him. She stood by his side, turning her attention onto all the doctors who were staring at the two of them. Dr Kulkarni, the Head Doctor for Harry, began to read his immediate wounds. "Mr. Potter has experienced a multitude of injuries to his body. The most difficult, we've managed to heal in time but he will have health complications for life."

Tom held his left arm out, "I'd like the clipboard."

"Yes, Mr. Riddle. In due time, but I must—"

"I don't care what you must do. I'm ordering you for the clipboard, hand it to me, now."

Dr Kulkarni sighed and passed the clipboard to Francisca who gave it to Tom. The doctor continued to recite the injuries that he would have the most difficulty with managing. "The damage to his wrist was the most severe of the injuries. With the skin on his thigh and top of his backside, we were able to repair the injury but he will feel phantom pain in trying to use the wrist extensively." She explains. Francisca's bottom lip wobbled for the poor boy. "He will need a glove for the hand which the Capitol is willing to provide so that during the winter in District 12, it won't lessen his ability to move. Mr. Potter, will forever need to wear the glove with the exception of summer. In bodies of warm water, he's allowed to remove the glove, but for cold waters will need to keep it on as it insulates everything inside of the glove and will keep his wrist warm."

Tom gritted his teeth, furious.

The doctor continued with her explanation of his condition. "The next

wound that was severe was his cheek. The slash he received damaged both the fats and muscles in the face. We were able to repair the underlying muscle but all the fat that was removed is going to leave his face, not destroyed, but damaged."

"You're saying that his cheek is completely destroyed."

"No, Mr. Riddle. I'm stating that the muscle is going to make a recovery but the fat that is there is gone, but we have begun the process of grafting his cheek so we've used the fats in his backside, stomach area, and thigh to be able to reconstruct what his cheek did look like. Only a nasty scar will remain." Tom's expression softened and he turned his gaze back to the teenager who had his entire right cheek covered with a large layer of cotton bandages. Dr Kulkarni continued. She pointed to her own face, demonstrating where the scar would span from. "From the inner-corner of the nose to the side of the cheek will be where the scar spans from. It will be faint and I think when it fully recovers, nothing about his face will change besides the scar." She smiles faintly.

"The next wound that will need our attention is Mr. Potter's internal bleeding. He had three broken ribs and his left lung was bruised. Mr. Riddle, it's something that has our attention at the forefront of our minds. Dr. Hennigar is a specialist in wounds like this so we'll have her around the clock, making sure that the bruising in the lungs heals, the Pulmonary artery ruptured during the procedure but we made sure to stabilise the bleeding - and the ribs will heal on their own." Dr Kulkarni puts her hands together in front of her lap. "So long as Mr. Potter doesn't do extensive movement during the first two months of his recovery, all the internal injuries should come to a full recovery. But as one knows, broken bones are more easily broken when previously broken. He should keep an eye on that when he does extensive work."

"What else is there to worry about?"

"Mr. Potter's vocal chords are a worry to us," Dr. Abakar starts. "I'm a specialist when it comes to anything around the voice so I'll be his personal therapist making sure everything is okay there."

Dr Kulkarni nodded in his direction. "Besides the vocal chords, other scars that he will obtain is the chunk missing from his upper left arm. We tried to put as much fat back into the arm, however," Dr Kulkarni cleared her throat. "The body rejected the fat so all that will be left in this area," she pointed to herself. "Will only be the muscle that

remains. Additionally, the slash on his arm he gained during his battle with Mr. Whitlock will slowly recover but a deep scar will remain. Talking about his fight with Mr. Whitlock, a lot more damage would've occurred with his joint in-between his shoulder and right arm if he didn't get the cream sponsored to him. It healed a lot of the issues that could've occurred there, however."

"He's always going to have issues carrying things with his right arm, isn't he?" Tom states.

"Yes," Dr Kulkarni agrees. "The knife went extremely far to the glenohumeral joint and yes," her expression went grim. "Mr. Potter will be able to move with his right arm but won't be able to extend his arm above his head like he would with his left arm. Our surgeons tried their best to repair the arena which is why he would be able to move it at all, however, he will only have limited mobility."

"Okay, but he will be able to do things swiftly, no?"

"Perhaps. We'll do tests when he wakes up to see how much physical therapy, Mr. Potter, will have to undergo before he can return to District 12. This year, everyone loves our beloved, Mr. Potter, so the President has told us to make sure that his condition is pristine before we discharge him." Dr Kulkarni tells them. "For some of the simpler wounds, his elbow and arm are broken so we've put them back into place but he will return to District 12 in a cast. Additionally, his ankle is only fractured so it's in a boot and will heal fully in two months. The cast will be taken off by the time Mr. Potter goes on his Victory Tour which we will assist with. We are his personal doctors."

"Who decided that?" Tom questioned the three doctors.

"The President, Mr. Riddle."

Tom's eyes narrowed at that and Francisca didn't understand why he looked so hostile in that moment but sighed, as if something changed his mind about the doctors. "I'd like the three of you to take the utmost care of him, and if anything in his condition changes whilst in 12 - you take your three asses and your nurses to him, and you will assist him."

Dr Kulkarni seemed taken aback at his language. "Of course, Mr. Riddle."

The head doctor continued with her explanation with the rest of his condition. "Mr. Potter has a heavy concussion and won't be able to

drink alcohol for a month. Since he is unconscious, and it's never a good idea to be unconscious whilst bearing a concussion - we're keeping an eye on how his mind associates the damage. It's a top priority that everything with his brain is okay." She tucks a curl behind her ear. "His hair is also okay. Nothing was taken out whilst Subject U9 fought Mr. Potter. He might occasionally have a fever, but that is to be decided. Those are all of his main injuries."

"What about his psychological injuries?" Tom asked. "The trauma from the Games?"

"We will have Psychologist Lkhagvasuren take care of Mr. Potter."

Tom shook his head. "Not that guy."

Dr Kulkarni tilted her head in confusion. "Our psychologist, Psychologist Lkhagvasuren is the best in all of Panem?—why do you not want Dr. Lkhagvasuren, Mr. Riddle?"

"I've had him before. Harry won't like him. Give him someone else."

"Who do you recommend, then?"

Francisca watched as Tom took a lot of time carefully considering who Harry should be taken after psychologically. The doctors watched interestingly as the teenager came to his conclusion with due time. "I'd like Professor Babbling to care of Harry's mental health. In the Academy, she has a psychiatrist licence and is known for making traumatised children at the Academy feel safe and wanted. I want Harry to be underneath her care."

"Despite the fact, she's supposed to be teaching soon?"

"The summer holidays are about to arrive, Dr. Kulkarni. She can miss school for this."

Dr. Kulkarni takes it into consideration. "Alright. But we'll only grant her the opportunity if Psychologist Lkhagvasuren is incapable of helping, Mr. Potter."

"Is that all?"

"For now, yes."

"Leave."

All the doctors gave Tom a hesitant stare, as if she didn't know what

to make of him. Tom wasn't in the mood, it seemed to Francisca and she apologised to them - leading them outside where she would be able to talk to them surrounding Tom's behaviour. She threatened them that everything that happened inside of Mr. Potter's hospital room was top secret and that if anything was leaked, everyone there would be fired and have hell to pain for messing the President's successor. Returning with a bag of chips, Tom didn't normally eat, but was the easiest thing on-hand for Francisca to find, she put it in on his lap.

The teenager had his head laid on the bed, exhausted, and stroking Harry's fragile hand softly. Tom appeared adorable to Francisca like this and she grabbed a blanket from the basket in the corner of the room, and wrapped it around him as she found a comfortable seat across the bed from Tom. Wrapping herself in a blanket, she sat there on her phone as she scrolled through her phone and answering her messages.

Everyone was obsessed with Harry Potter.

His name was trending; the name, the Boy-Who-Lived was trending; the name, Golden Boy was trending; the name, Angel of Death was trending; and other names were all beginning to associate themselves with Harry's. She liked all of them but the one she liked the most was the Boy-Defying-Fire. It made sense. He was the only one who didn't get burned besides Ladislao, but she didn't like to think about that.

The teenager was ethereal.

With his dark hair curling at the edges of his face, the teenager's single braid hung lowly to his face that made it both adorable but mystical like a recovering warrior. She gave herself the time to observe him up close and judge the bandage's size underneath his right eye. It was large, and if anything—the scar on his right cheek was going to be viciously red and pigmented. Grabbing out her makeup bag, she gently took Harry's right arm that had the issues with his wrist but kept it on the bed. She wanted to judge the colour of Harry's skin which was more brown than tan, and the other small scars on his arms and fingers from his childhood. There she began to colour correct them, trying to find out what would be the best solution to try and minimise the scar's damage.

Francisca would have to discuss this with Morgan and Bonavich about how they should best dress Harry from now on. They should also discuss his new wardrobe for District 12 now that he was safe and

alive at the Capitol. She began to sort through the colours that best made Harry pop with colour and brought out her laptop to search for what hairstyles suited the teenager the best. She thought the one he had on now was natural and chic; and would now become a Capitol trend as she snapped a picture of his hairstyle. Sketching it out in her notebook, she wondered the other ways they could include braids in his hair. Ones he could do at home.

Keeping herself entertained with the thought of Harry investigating other braiding techniques, she began to create her own catalogue that Harry would be able to take back to District 12 with him. Francisca observed the pendant on Harry's chest that had Tom's note and Harry's friend's letter—she unclipped it from his chest. It looked to be causing his discomfort as he knitted his eyebrows together in pain. They didn't know how long he was going to be unconscious for but trying to make his healing process as smooth as possible, this would have to go for the time being.

Francisca pursed her lips.

Gold looks fantastic on Harry. She began to design golden jewellery designs that she would like to gift him for fashion reasons as Francisca thought about Tom. The teenager was slumped to his side, unlike how he ever would be, but he was here because he cared about Harry more than anyone else in the world. Because he trusted Francisca to take care of him, whilst he took care of Harry. She began to create a necklace that would symbolise both Harry and Tom as a gift for Harry - but then thought, if she could make one for Harry, but couldn't she make one for Tom?

They would have to be different, she declared.

Tom looked better in silver than gold.

If she created a necklace with a locket with both of their names on it, swapped it and gave it to the other - she thought it could look wonderful! On Harry's, she put a small T + H in the engravings on the back of the necklace. On Tom's, she did the same but H + T. That way, nobody would know besides them and her that it was for the two of them! Except, she would have to change up the designs so nobody was able to make the connection besides the ones in on the idea.

She made Harry's a slim locket that would be able to fit a small gemstone on the front. Nothing worth of value, but she decided out of all the gemstones; obsidian would be the best fit. Unbreakable like

him. For Tom, she didn't choose a stone. Instead, it was entirely silver with the large T on the front. Symbolising his own name. Inside, they were able to put photos of each other there - close to their hearts. She kept coming up with ideas for the necklaces as she distracted herself from all the emotional pain in the room.

Tom woke up to find a blanket and packet of salted chips in his lap.

He yawned and found his hand covering Harry's as he sat up in the chair.

Nervously, knitting his eyebrows together he looked across from him to find Francisca knocked out cold, snoring. The woman was asleep as the three of them rested together after the week they had to endure; Harry more than anyone else. Tom kissed Harry's hand, before leaning forward and continuing to stroke it. It was midnight and the Capitol was still abuzz with the knowledge of the victor of the 74th Annual Hunger Games. However, the victor was still unconscious.

He observed Harry, noticing all the disfigurements the Capitol made him endure and found himself internally loathing Dumbledore more. The teenager gritted his teeth and rested his head against Harry's rough hands. Vengeance would find the two of them. Tom and Harry would get their revenge against the rest of the world, Tom knew. He would be at Harry's side as the Capitol came crumbling down. He would make sure they got what they deserved for doing this to Harry.

Tom began to cry.

He didn't know why but his eyes began to turn red and angry. Letting Harry's hand go apprehensively, he rubbed his eyes raw. He hated this. Hated the feelings he caused him; and loved them at the same time. He liked cruelty but not like this. Tom kept rubbing his eyes because he couldn't stop crying. He found that neither Tom or Harry were pretty criers but if any of them were prettier, it would be Harry. Whenever he cried, he was able to breathe if only barely. Tom had his breath taken away from him as he sobbed and shuttered from the pain, the anguish. He kept thinking of Harry's death and how he would die if that ever happened.

He almost died. He almost died. He almost died. He almost died.

He's barely breathing. He's barely breathing. He's barely breathing.

Tom almost lost him. He almost lost him.

What if Harry never wakes up again?—like he was.

Tom decided that was fine. If he woke up with traumas. If he woke up wanting to kill himself; despite how that would break Tom internally. Tom was choosing Harry. Their revenge, their lives, their futures. He was staking everything on him. No longer the Capitol, but the Districts - and as much as Tom loved Harry, he hated the Districts. Everything the Capitol made them stand for. It internally impacted him and his decision to pick Harry, but if Harry could overcome the Capitol. He could overcome the Districts. Together, even if at a distance.

That meant he had to pick himself up.

Tom had to get his act together. Harry hadn't left yet; the Hunger Games weren't over. He was still fighting for his life. And for the both of them, Tom had to protect them. Harry wasn't there to help him and that was fine. He would only need to pick up the slack. It was all good, Tom wasn't going to hold it against Harry because he wanted him to be fine - but things were still dangerous for the both of them. Tom kissed Harry's hand again.

"Stay alive."

And he left Harry in Francisca's care; he trusted her to do this.

He returned with a multitude of things. A blanket from Tom's bedroom that smelt of him. Soft silk pyjamas for when he woke up. His phone - that Tom wanted him to take back to 12 with three other spares in case his phone broke for some unknown reason. He brought his own suitcase and found himself setting up a small bedroom for himself in Harry's room. The suitcase was out of the way and underneath the couch in the corner of the room as Harry received luxurious care and space. And Tom brought his own devices so he could stalk the world from Harry's bedroom.

Andromeda gave Tom a call. "How is he, Tom?"

"Alive." Tom said shortly, unable to say anything else with his eyes turning redder. Automatically, his brain decided to associate surrounding Harry with emotions so now he was a mess. He felt his cheeks turning red. He tried to form a coherent sentence. "He's—he's going to get better. The wrists are the worst, they—the doctors have used some fat exchange things so his cheek will still form his old face with a large scar. A lot of things are b-broken. Harry has a bruised

lung and some internal bleeding," he sharply inhales - knowing he was talking too quickly for his emotions to handle. "His wrist and shoulder will be the only two permanent injuries."

"Fair enough." She agreed. "They were quite bad. How are you feeling?"

"Me?"

"It doesn't sound pretty from how you're describing it, Tom. And I can hear how heavily you're breathing." Andromeda states plainly as if that was an easy deduction. "Make sure not to answer calls from Narcissa or Bella. They're both ecstatically talking about you and Harry—" he inhales, nervous, "—but not together. Just the both of you. They'll scream in your ear with happiness if you answer them. They're both as obnoxious as the other."

"Who else?"

She hums, "I don't know. They're not my sisters but I know that everyone was ecstatic for you and I to win the bets, even if mine was unofficial. They didn't know how much tampering you did so they didn't realise how fixed the results were in favour of Harry from the start."

Tom and Andromeda talked about a multitude of things like if he felt ready to meet the rebels inside of the Capitol underneath the park; what he was planning to do about his friends; school; Dumbledore; amongst other things. However, the main topic was always surrounding Harry. Andromeda told Tom that Remus was drinking a lot of alcohol and that he should smooth over that issue before it got out of hand again before he told her, he would, and that he was going to have to be extremely careful with how much he supported Harry from that moment onwards whilst being in the Capitol. She began to talk about wanting to take Tom to a record store before Wednesday - it was Monday - and that they should meet up the next day so Andromeda could introduce him to someone of importance.

Agreeing, only because Tom wanted to grow more connected with the rebels for both his and Harry's safety - he was debating Francisca's now she was so involved with them; but to protect them, he made plans to leave the hospital tomorrow for some time to meet this person. Tom spoke to Dr Kulkarni about his vitals and if everything was progressing well. Enough for Tom to allow himself to study the media that was streaming through his phone.

It was all about Harry, it was unnerving.

About how they loved him; how he was stunning, powerful, gorgeous, clever; and how they were endlessly sexualising and idolising him. Some of the Capitol members who went to the gym were posting about Harry's 'gains.' And methods to get as strong as him, the Capitol going wild for the teenager who bet their game. Some were even infantising, like he was a baby who didn't know anything better than to kill from the compassion in his heart - and it was sickening to Tom. Harry wasn't a child. Tom wasn't one either. They were both about to enter adulthood.

They were teenagers who knew better than to be treated as children because that's how they seemed to be years prior. However, the Capitol was whack. Since the age was sixteen, Harry was, turning seventeen in less than a fortnight, it was a grey area in their thoughts. Twelve was a baby. Eighteen was a warrior. Sixteen was somewhere in the middle. Not really, but the point was that the Capitol had a hard time metabolising the idea that they were their own people and had minds of their own. Tom was sick of it; Harry was going to be bothered by it horrifically once he saw what the media said about him. It wasn't going to help his recovery at all. Perhaps Tom should revoke his phone so he didn't latch himself onto the words of what others said.

Tom's was the most important so he should only hear (mostly) what he said.

Tom tucked Harry's phone into his suitcase and kept scrolling on his own phone to see more of what they were saying so he could study them.

———

The next day he wore a cardigan, despite it being summer, because the rain was pouring down.

Andromeda met him with a red scarf around her neck and the two of them walked down the street to one of the business shopping centres in the Capitol. Going up the escalator, the two teenagers kept walking, untalking to this record store Andromeda kept on mentioning nonchalantly. Tom thought it had a deeper meaning behind the topic so he continued to accept her words for what they were. They got stopped a few times, the message that he was involved with the Hunger Games spreading around due to one of the sponsors; and Tom

accepted that he was seen also as a victor in this year's Hunger Games. Andromeda questioned him. "You got him sponsorships?"

"Remus Lupin wasn't doing anything. I had to do something."

"Oh, and that was your lie?"

"Dumbledore did do it back in his day - I thought it was believable enough."

Andromeda gave Tom the stank eye.

"You lied not only to Dumbledore, but also about something he did not say." She sighed, holding a hand to her forehead. "Come on, Tom. That wasn't the smartest idea." Tom glared at her and kept walking. He didn't want to hear her nonsense even if she was right. Tom didn't want to admit it. Andromeda said nothing but only was eyeing him, unhappily.

They made their way to the record store. It was called; Spots of Magic.

Tom felt the name resonate with him as he stepped into the futuristic store alongside Andromeda. She headed over to the counter quietly and smoothly as if she wasn't about to talk to the clerk about incriminating topics. Tom followed her and kept his head focused on the different albums around the place, reading their titles and where they came from. There were albums from the districts, he discovered as he turned his gaze back to the man who was staring at him. "Tom Riddle," the man began. "What are you doing here?"

"He's my plus one, Dean." She told the clerk whose eyes were widening.

"Him?—Andy."

Andromeda sighed before holding an hand to her head as if she was exhausted by the reaction. Tom didn't understand why but nodded his head at this Dean. The adult eyed him with caution before turning his head back to Andromeda. "You two, back—now."

"Of course. I'd love to find that album if you've got it in the back somewhere."

They walk to the back where Dean immediately points at him.
"Him? Out of all people."

“You’ve got to understand the context, Dean.”

Tom shrugged his shoulders. “What context does he need?”

Andromeda turns to Tom, before making her lips smaller with thought. She points to the door. “Get out, Tom. I’m going to first explain it to him but I don’t need you here, okay?” Shrugging his shoulders, he began to walk towards the door and leave. Walking around the store, ignoring the looks he was getting - he headed over to District 12’s section. Glancing through some of the records, he found that he wanted to buy some. For Harry’s hospital room so that he would be able to listen to music that would familiarise him with home.

The records were interesting to look at and observe.

Some were from decades ago, some were from a few years ago. Tom put a record on one of the record players and listened to the music. Nobody bothered with him as they preferred to be around the higher districts. Leaning against the records, he pursed his lips - listening to the music. Deciding that no matter what Dean and Andromeda were discussing about him and Harry, he would buy some music regardless. He had a bank account that had all the money in the world inside of it. So much money that he didn’t even know how much he had besides it went into the billions; it came with the price of being the President’s successor.

Looking at the different qualities of the record players, he chose a wooden one. It was wooden on the outside and it had a black paint that was coated over the rest of the non-wooden areas. It was a thousand dollars but he got it for Harry anyway. Additionally, he brought five albums from District 12. He glanced at the ones that seemed less old than the others. Dream by Juvenile. Mist by Lake. Garden Rose by Rattlesnake. Impossible by Coal Miners. And; Lillies by the Marauders.

The other clerk served him and he glanced at his purchases, content.

He hoped Harry would like the music.

Tom began to look at the other sections of the record store as albums from different Districts caught his eyes. He didn’t buy anymore, finding things like this unnecessary unless they had a proper purpose but thought Harry would like music regardless of where it came from; with the exception he now had memories tied from people from the different Districts. He would only buy more if Harry wakes up and

tells him he wants more. It was no issue for Tom to get more for him.

Andromeda opened the door and signalled Tom to come inside.

Following, and hoping it wouldn't be that big of a deal like Dean made it out to be for him joining, the older adult crossed his arms as he glared down at him. And nobody glared down at Tom like he did no matter what they were pissed about. The exception was Harry but, Tom admitted, of course it was only with him. Dean was demanding him for answers.

"Do you really love him?"

Tom flushed with the question instantaneously, not expecting to be bombarded like that. Andromeda smacked a hand to her forehead - eyeing Dean as if he couldn't be any more subtle. Tom held up the records. "I bought these for him." He didn't answer Dean's question; he doesn't think he could even if he wanted to. Tom and Harry had only been with each other for a week before the Games. How does he expect him to know the answer to that question?

He's never loved someone before.

Andromeda turned to Tom, eyeing him before sighing and turning back to Dean. "Another question, perhaps?"

"Why do you want to join us?"

Tom gave a seriously constructed and thought out answer. "Because the Capitol won't be beneficial to me, no more than it already has. Because I now have other priorities - and find that the way things are right now isn't working for Panem." Dean gives him a hard glare as if he doesn't believe a word of what he is saying. Tom presses further. "I care about Harry; and I won't know if Harry is safe in the Districts. Likewise, it's more appropriate to be with him in the Districts than making him suffer in the Capitol somewhere he hasn't been since—" he holds his tongue, constructing a more convincing statement. "The Districts are his home. I don't find the Capitol to hold any more purpose to me. As a result, I find that me moving to the Districts would be better than Harry moving to the Capitol."

"What a load of bull."

"Dean!" Andromeda shouted at him. "What he is saying is true."

"And now do you know, Andy?—you've only just started talking to

him a few days ago."

She shrugs her shoulders but her eyes are fierce, as if she was never going to back down once she had a purpose. Tom found the Blacks' love to be overwhelming sometimes when it was extended to him but never, has he felt this, probably because he hasn't. This was Andromeda. Never once has she extended her thoughts to him before Harry. Out of all the Black sisters, hers was the most overwhelming and annoying to Tom because he could feel the power of her emotions behind her eyes and words.

"There is a reason for why I've never spoken to him before!" She shouts at Dean. "Last year, Tom betted and drank; did a lot of stupid things with the Hunger Games. But this year, a complete flip has happened that everyone has noticed - so of course, I did! He's my sisters' daydreams, I'm forever in his facility. And yes, I've found that this change has backed up what he's said as true. He cares. He's never cared before; and that's a good thing. People can change. They're allowed to. Think Dean, the kid he used to be never once admitted when he was wrong."

"I'm not admitting I'm wrong," Tom tells her. "I'm saying there are better benefits with the Districts than the Capitol."

"Yes, but can you agree with me when I say the Hunger Games is wrong?"

Tom glared at her, but reluctantly whispered, "yes."

"See!" Andromeda gestures to him. "He admitted he was wrong about what he previously thought was right. That is change, Dean. It's okay for people to change. Harry has changed this. Caused this change. I'm not going to start throwing our preconceived notions and suggestions and questionable remarks, all I'm going to say are facts. Harry is memorable. He makes people change their thoughts about things. He's impactful. He's got people hoping for his recovery. He's got people in the Capitol wanting to see more of the angel-like personality he's got. Realistically, that's just his natural compassion shining through."

Andromeda points at Tom. "He bought—you bought those for him. There are different kinds of ways a person shows their care. It's physically caring for them, emotionally, and a lot of kinds, but another is financially. These are instances where care is evident; and you're disregarding them?" She turned to Dean. "It's meaningless because he's turning against his beliefs for someone he cares about.

That's noble and equally as important as Harry siding with his own beliefs about wanting to create change."

"Fine," Dean sighed. "He can come to the meeting but it doesn't mean I have to like him."

"I'm right here, you know."

"I'm acting like you're not because I don't like you."

Tom glared at him. Andromeda sighed before taking him underneath his arm. "Alright, let's go Tom. Everything for this introduction has solved a lot of issues I was going to have previously. Let's take you back to your beau."

Tom set up the record player and showed it to Francisca who stared at it in awe.

She bobbed down and tilted her head at the record player that was set up beside Harry's bedside table. He placed the records on their sides beside the record player in a basket he was able to obtain for them, and he opened one of the albums. Grabbing the circular disk, he placed it on the tray and put the needle on the disk. Then, it began to play music once Tom turned it on. Francisca beamed at Tom, clapping his hands together. "This is amazing, Tom! Truly."

The music that played was a combination of jazz and country and he relaxed his shoulders. Harry seemed to be relaxed to the sound that was labelled "No Monsters Like You" by Rattlesnake. Tom took a seat beside Harry, and took his hand. Tom turned to Francisca. "What was the design you were drawing up before?" He asked.

"Oh, this?" She shows him her laptop. She passes it to him. "I wanted you guys to have a gift."

"Are these necklaces?"

"Yes; they're supposed to be matching necklaces but since you and Harry are not supposed to know each other. I made them discreet. I know you don't like Dumbledore so - I thought the simplistics of the designs would work well with the both of you. How do you like it? Do I have to change anything?" Tom found the design to be precious. Like he thought before; Tom had a suspicious feeling that he cared for Francisca. She had done a lot for him and he felt the mutual exchange

of trust warming his heart ever-so quietly.

Francisca was like a child. Growing up desensitised to the horrors the Hunger Games brought, she didn't see atrocities like the Districts did. She was a child in the sense she had a child-like excitement for the games. Her own hopes for who she wanted to win; and a complete product of her environment. However, despite this Tom could still feel her heart. She had taken care of him during some of his worst moments and helped assist him with Harry without much interrogation at all. It meant their trust was mutual.

Which made Tom come to the conclusion; he wanted her to come with them. To the Districts.

As much as Tom knew the Capitol would always be her home, the Districts would be safer for her. And Morgan; Rhodes; Bonavich. Harry would want to know that they were safe, but they wouldn't want to leave. The Capitol was their home. War wasn't what they were made for. Tom pursed his lips, thinking at the design Francisca had made with her heart for the two of them. Harry and Tom. She didn't have any family at the Capitol, a lot of them separated from her when she was young. Perhaps she'd like to come with them anyway because she cared about them; ignoring Morgan, Rhodes, and Bonavich.

When the time came for that choice, he would figure it out. Tom knew he would always be able to.

On Wednesday, late at night, he departed from the hospital and began to walk down the streets of the Capitol hidden beneath a hoodie. Tom didn't like large, overlarge jumpers nor did he like them with hoods attached to the back; but this one had its suited purpose. Hiding him from street-goers as he made his way to Tooker Park. The hood covered everything from his forehead and across, and the baggy material made him feel as if he was drowning in it but Tom Riddle would never wear this - so it was the best disguise.

Finding the staircase that led to the Underground, a place where Tom would never enter ever, he found himself cautiously glancing around to see what he could find. Lots of workers, all avoiding his gaze as Tom tried to find the secret area the rebels were meeting at. It disturbed Tom how brutal their injuries were. Some didn't have limbs or tongues, Avoxes, and some had mental issues about the world above as he heard some groaning in pain. Nerves. Tom ignored them, knowing they weren't going to be able to stop him, and opened the door. Immediately, a gun was to his forehead. "Who are you and what

are you doing here?"

A muscular woman held the gun to his forehead as he shut the door behind him. There was no reason to do this out in the open. Tom glanced around the room to find a group of nine, including Andromeda and her boyfriend sitting in the corner of the room observing his interaction. Alongside, the 'Dean' he met the day before. A child was there too - which Tom found odd but accepted it as he was clever enough to be there. The woman asked again. "Are you illiterate? I asked, 'who are you and what are you doing here?'"

Tom took off his hood to show them all who he was. He didn't need an introduction. The woman paused, blinked, before her facial features grew cold. "Tom Riddle," she hums anxiously - the gun returns to his forehead. "What are you doing here?"

"Crick," Andromeda sighed. "I told you why he was here."

"I need to hear it for myself."

"He's bad at feelings," Dean - the clerk - told her. "I've already asked and it seemed real enough."

"That doesn't matter. He's getting himself in business he has no right to know." She has furious onyx eyes that bleed fury into everyone around them. She appeared to be less angry but more stern and calculated, knowing Tom was a bad idea. He scoffed, rolling his eyes. This was pointless. Tom began. "You guys want to know if I'm in-love with him."

The child laughs. "I like this guy, he's funny."

Tom turns his head to the child, underweight but content, who grins at him like he said the funniest thing in the world. He was also wearing a hood that was a deep blue, all too big for him, and a medical mask. Still, Tom could see the baby fat that still held close to his cheeks.

He decided it was best not to get on any of their nerves; especially, a child's because he was pissed off about being undermined. It didn't always work like he'd want it. Tom shrugs his shoulders. "I think if anyone has any reason to be here," he turns back to the women, "it's me. You know me from the media. You know me from my title. You can search up anything about me; except for Harry. So to answer your question; I don't know. I'm not going to know unless he wakes up, but I still care for him - that extends to none of you."

“I suggest we keep him,” the child suggests.

“And who are you?”

Tom turns around and asks, the child’s cheeks rising to tell Tom he was smiling at his comment. He was sitting on the counter that was extended across to the other side of the room. The child moved his knees so he was able to lean one of his cheeks on them. “My name is Neuro. I’m fourteen and I study with you at the Academy. I’m in my first year.”

Thinking back to what he knows about this child is that he’s got to be fifteen to enter, but he’s about to enter his second year - like how Tom’s about to enter his final year. And the school only lets in the most prosperous, wealthy, and intelligent children of the Capitol. The rest go to public schools. Tom observes Neuro, thinking what he knows of the teenager despite being so small. “What’s your IQ?”

“Interested?” Neuro hums, cheekily. “180.”

“That makes sense.”

The woman who pointed the gun at Tom’s head previously tilts her head in confusion. “What is that supposed to do with anything? Neuro, you shouldn’t explain yourself to strangers, and Riddle you shouldn’t end up agreeing with this idiot.” Tom ignores her. He finds the teenager to be perhaps one of the smartest people in the room. Andromeda’s IQ is 145. Her boyfriend would have an estimate of 120. This Crick would have an average of 100. The rest from the range of 100-160 but no one would beat Neuro or him. Tom’s IQ was 192. He wondered what Harry's was.

Tom shrugs his shoulders. “He’s one of the smartest people in this room, if you know anything about Intelligence Quotient. Additionally, calling Neuro an idiot for being himself is both true and false. Geniuses usually are a bit weird.”

“Take Tom for example!” Neuro cheers, giggling.

It didn’t erase the fact Neuro was still fourteen and growing with knowledge.

As long as Tom could keep Harry safe and sound, he would manage with these idiots.

Chapter End Notes

Neuro mi amor
AHHHHHHHHh
Up next, "seven"
I'll add the fonts and shit when I edit this once it's all done
P S

seven

Chapter Notes

Posted: 17th of March, 2024
Sorry for not posting Wednesday life is hectic atm
I'm posting 2 chapters today and next Sunday will have
Wednesday's chapter as well.
Exam season

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tom sat beside Neuro and this woman, who introduced herself as Cornelia. She had scars all over her arms and had oil covering her face. The women's hair was a mess, in a messy bun, and otherwise was unconventionally attractive. On the other hand, Crick didn't have many redeeming qualities that made her attractive but she was terrifying - and Tom thought that was what she was trying to go for. Neuro sat cross-legged on the chair, and leaned forward on the table holding both hands in his arms. Tom found the teenager perplexing. He was young but thirsting for knowledge if he had any of the same troubles Tom did growing up at the Academy. Neuro got into the Academy through IQ alone.

Surprisingly, Neuro had a lack of facial features in common with Tom but more like Harry. Unlike the pasty skin a lot of Capitol members had - despite the tones of their skin colour, his was vibrant as if he didn't protect himself from the sun. He was evidently white, but had a tan that showcased his freckles extremely well. His hair was curly, not to the extremes Harry had but not straight and plain like Tom's. He was also a sandy-blond. Tom thought he would look conventionally attractive if he didn't have the masks, and hoods covering his identity.

Tom kept his own hood down. He hated the weight of it.

Andromeda wore nightwear. She wasn't covered up in a hood or long-night wear. Only clubbing wear alongside Ted. It was as if they were pretending to go clubbing but instead they ended up in a dingy downstairs warehouse. Tom noticed how Andromeda wasn't doing much to include him with anything, she was letting him mingle. Get to know how business works himself, not trying to control him. She was allowing him to do his own things, he noted. It both bothered him and relaxed him. It meant she wouldn't be a problem in the future.

There was an old man, Meios, who was hanging out in a corner of the room who Tom knew. He was a politician but he didn't notice him at first to be able to identify him. Tom knew that Meios was observing him but said nothing about it. There was mutual trust brewing, he could feel it. The eldest, Meios, began to speak on behalf of the Rebels. "Districts 3, 4, 7, 8, and 11 have been communicating with us."

"District 3's new… Silver Graves?" Neuro spoke up.

"Correct. Whilst Esteven is still in the Capitol - until Harry Potter wakes up and finally finishes the 74th Annual Hunger Games, I've had a conversation with her about the possible chance her District has to rebel. She declared it with the utmost certainty, that she'd follow whatever path her vengeance for her son would allow her. Additionally, she wants to make contact with Harry." Meios turns to Tom. "I am quite sure after the closing ceremony, you will be able to speak to Harry again - advise him to converse with Mrs. Graves. She will be an ally for him."

Gamma, a twenty-one year-old girl, lazes about her next comment. "Remus Lupin is sure not going to be any hope."

Meios shrugs his shoulders, diplomatically. "There is no way to determine the usefulness of that man unless he is sober but for now, he stays out of the plans."

"What happens if I'm able to communicate with Remus, though?" Tom suggests.

"And what about it?" Crick tilted her head.

Tom thought for a moment. Remus Lupin was quite useless but in retrospect was the only being, victor from keeping Harry from being alone in District 12. Remus had experience with the things Harry was going to experience in the future. They should be able to use him for something but Tom could conjure nothing about what he could use for him right that instant. So he lied instead. "If we cannot contact Harry directly, the next best outcome would be to go through Remus." The teenager shrugs his shoulders, fiddling with his hands underneath the table. "Likewise, if we're able to tell Remus' plans - he could guide Harry, who wouldn't, in the right direction."

"Without alcohol?" Meios questioned. He was adamant.

"Francisca can try but we've been weaning him off it whilst Harry was

in the games so he would be able to assist the sponsorship gifts we sent him." Tom's brain travels hundreds of kilometres per second he sits there. "If Francisca would be able to get onto Harry's prep team that is led by Morgan, she would be able to travel to the Districts. Additionally, I'm not sure how I would be able to get there and assist but—"

Neuro tapped Tom.

He turned to the teenager who was lying on his arms, exhaustedly, but had his head turned to him. Tom didn't speak as Neuro suggested. "You're the President's successor. Last year you took a trip to 1 because the District 1 girl won. This year, it would only be natural for you and your friends—Andromeda's sisters and other companions to go there too."

"It's 12." Tom states. "They'd let us for 12?"

"Potentially but they've got to think - the Capitol aren't the trapped ones. The Districts are so they'd have to accommodate you guys. Then, you'd be able to sneak to Harry's house in Victor's Village, turn off all and every camera/voice recorder, and be able to be with him." Neuro shrugs his shoulders. "The best place for you Capitol folk would be on the train they took to the Capitol so it wouldn't be hard to sneak off to Victor's Village especially with the knowledge that Harry would back you up with."

"Hm, you suggest we have a work holiday."

"For nearly a month, you'd be able to get away with it."

Neuro points to Harry who's in the hologram. "Additionally, he'll be back for Christmas and New Year's at the Capitol - for your birthday through the Victory's Tour. If you'd like to sneak to 12 and hangout with him for twelve days, and then again at the Capitol; it'd be a good suggestion of an idea you could plan. However, it depends how keen Dumbledore is to keep you two apart because right now you both sound like rabbits multiplying."

Tom glares at Neuro but finds that he isn't going to argue with a teenager over his own ghastly opinion. The teenager thinks about it. "If I took Narcissa with me, you'd think she'd join us?"

Andromeda pauses. "You should take them both to 12 during your holiday, but for the Victory Tour suggest going alone with only Francisca. It works a whole lot better that way."

“Alright,” he agrees.

The group begins to talk about other plans. “Next year is the 3rd Quarter Quell. Nobody knows what it’s about yet, but if anything - it’s going to be horrendous.” Meios tells them. “The 1st Quarter Quell was where the Districts had to vote on who they wanted to go into the Hunger Games and the 2nd Quarter Quell had double the number of tributes.” Neuro stares at Meios intently, as if he has something to say. Meios continues to proceed with his announcement. “The rebellion is going to have to wait until we know what the 75th Hunger Games is about. Then, we’ll take action with the Victors to try and get everyone out of the arena as we can.”

Tom watches. Crick speaks up. “That means until the details of the 75th Hunger Games we cannot act. Who is the Head Game Maker for next year?”

“Potentially, Abraxas Malfoy or Kingsley Shacklebolt.”

“It’s between those two?”

Andromeda sighed, Gamma leaning back and vaping, whilst Neuro posed the question. “Abraxas isn’t going to betray the Capitol. It has to be Kingsley Shacklebolt. When will it be announced?”

Meios passes Neuro his laptop. “Once the Victory Tour comes around. Dumbledore is still considering who will be the best fit. Additionally, it’s all depending on Tom’s relationship with Abraxas’ son. Tom, the more friendly you are to Lucius - the less likely Dumbledore is going to pick Abraxas. If we can use his lack of trust against Dumbledore, we can see the likelihood of patterns he’s going to pick according to it.”

“I’m bait, essentially?” Tom tilts his head.

Neuro shows Tom the data, pointing to it. “It’s necessary. Dumbledore is a fickle man. He has idealistic morals but hardly uses them for good. His mistrust in you is already evident. Back when we were fifteen, it would’ve been ideal for you to begin your training underneath him to take over the Presidency when you were eighteen but - he hasn’t.” Tom’s eyes slowly opened at that, but knew the old man never trusted him a day in his life before. “It means he’s also using you as bait to the Districts. If Dumbledore dies, you’ll take over.”

“But I won’t unless he dies.”

“Precisely - which means if we secure your positions on our side and with the rebels, he won’t have a back-up person if he dies.” Tom’s mind went immediately to Snape, but knew no matter the outcome would never take Dumbledore’s place as president. He was so childish to Snape. Tom hated him and didn’t mention him. Snape was irrelevant. Neuro continued, “which means you’re there has handsome decorum. Perhaps to silence the Districts but realistically, that isn’t going to work. Not with the Districts nor the Capitol. You’ve made your move and Dumbledore’s beginning to realise how untrustworthy you are.”

“Still, you’d rather be in the position around him than not.”

“Exactly,” Neuro says. “I mean, all his actions are evidence of trust or mistrust against you. If you keep doing what you’re doing - trying to find ways to be around Harry - his trust is going to diminish with you. What I suggest is whilst Harry is knocked out cold, you find an apartment to live in.” Tom found that thought perplexing.

“For what reason exactly should I move?” Tom tilts his head. “That would grow less trust, wouldn’t it?”

Neuro flicks to the screen to Narcissa. “Andromeda’s sister, Narcissa, is a compassionate being. Additionally, she can tell that you aren’t happy at the Mansion. If she comes with you and you’re around Dumbledore hypothetically at a party or a gala, she should suggest you moving out. You’ll have to tell her, confide in her you’d no longer want to live her and for her to act it out around Dumbledore, and for you to agree with her - Dumbledore unable to decline, technically if you move out around your eighteenth birthday but it will give you the freedom of being out of his hairs.” The teenager was extremely clever, “but you should continue to keep up your social life with the Blacks and Knights of Walpurgis.”

Tom turned to Neuro. “Do you happen to know Regulus Black?”

“Yes,” Neuro tilted his head, curiously, “why?”

“He wants to join the Knights of Walpurgis. What are your thoughts on the idea?”

“Perhaps you should allow him. His brother disappeared as a Peacekeeper years ago and nobody knows where he is but that he’s serving the Districts somewhere. Keeping him close would be able to determine where or not he wants to follow the rebel path with his brother or uphold the family name in the Districts. Realistically,”

Neuro debates in his head before saying it out loud, “I wouldn’t be surprised if he chooses his family instead of the Districts.”

Dean speaks up. “Additionally, this spot has become too known with the addition of Sir Pre-President here so we should find another base for us to hide in. I think we should take the penthouse of the Folate Building Estate. All in favour?”

“I,” the sound rang out and Tom nodded his head in agreement.

Dean stood up and waved to them a goodbye. He left first. The next two people to leave were Andromeda and Ted. Before they left, Andromeda asked if the next meeting was on the Monday to which Meios agreed with them. They left and slowly but surely, the rest of the members left. Meios, Neuro, and Tom all sat in the room together. Neuro was asleep and Meios bore his eyes at Tom whilst Tom did the same. “What are you doing here, Tom?”

He shrugs his shoulders. “I’m here because I know the winning side.”

“Is it for the boy?” Meios questions. “Harry Potter?”

Tom doesn’t say anything to disagree so Meios takes that as confirmation. The sixty-one or two year-old comments. “Dumbledore has seen your disregard for presidency as of late and knows your lie about your involvement with the District 12 tributes. You need to be careful. I’ll keep him distracted as much as I can but with a man like that - he can see through most of my lies. Tom, you need to get out of that Mansion and find another place to live. Additionally, with the upcoming Quarter Quell - you need to be careful. We don’t know what Harry’s involvement is yet but Dumbledore isn’t going to leave him alone. If he’s anything like Cedric Diggory or Cho Chang or Viktor Krum or Angelina Johnson - you need to keep him safe. We don’t him brought, okay?”

At the prospect, he gulps, narrowing his eyebrows. Sex-work is another obligation occasional victors have to go through if they’re pretty enough. Tom bit his inner-cheek. Harry is definitely pretty enough but Tom doesn’t want Harry to go through with any of that; he’ll keep him safe, how, he doesn’t know yet. So long as the rebellion starts quickly before he can be confronted with the duty, the less likely he’ll be to do any of those things.

Standing up, Neuro grabbed onto his wrist. “Can you take me home?”

Tom blinked with questions at him, but didn’t decline.

Meios stood up and bidded them both a goodbye.

Neuro took Tom's hand into his and went out the way Tom came in. Through the tunnels and up the staircases, the two teenagers walked side-by side together. Before they left the room, Neuro flicked his hood back on. Neither said anything as the workers watched them depart. Standing close to Tom, Neuro began to speak. "Sometimes it's daunting walking alone."

Tom observed him. "Why did you decide to join a war, then?"

"Because," Neuro seemed more vulnerable holding hands with Tom and standing by his side, than he was in the rebels meeting - a place Tom felt more vulnerable with being instead of being by the kid's side. "It would be a waste not to use my intelligence for something." The kid snapped his head at the slightest sound to his left, hand tightening in Tom's. Tom could feel his fear as they walked together in the direction of his house. "It doesn't mean I have to like walking by myself."

"It makes sense, you're a kid."

"Don't call me a kid," Neuro glares.

Tom nods his head, knowing why he was pissed but kept quiet on that matter. "You're fourteen. As much as I'd like to say the difference between us isn't huge, maturity plays a large part into our developments. I'm nearly eighteen and people like to tell me, I'm still a kid which pisses me off too. You're not alone there, but," he squeezes his hand comfortingly, "it doesn't mean you're not allowed to be scared. Like I said, you're fourteen. People don't give kids many choices when they're kids."

"So you understand?"

"Of course, I do."

The two take the train to Neuro's house and the younger teenager sleeps up against his shoulder. Tom allows him, solely because what he is doing is a lot braver than what Tom was doing. Bravery was a capricious thing; the situation always changed and it was uncertain of the path ahead. However, this fourteen year-old teenager declared war against the Capitol for some reason Tom doesn't know. All he knows is that he's decided to take action against the Capitol because he has something useful to offer, his brain. And it was a daunting task for anyone, to betray their home like Neuro was doing but he decided to

anyway. Tom allowed him the luxury to touch him like he did. He tapped Neuro wake when they got to the line Neuro said belonged to his home.

Neuro took his hand again as they walked up the stairs of the train station, Neuro leaning close to Tom. Tom watched as he began to figure out why Neuro didn't like being outside by himself after dark. The streets closer to the centre of the Capitol were bright and luxurious. Not a criminal in sight, but out here — near the end of the Capitol's circle, it was dark and frightening to say the least. For a kid. He heard screams, he heard sick laughs, he heard cat-calling to Neuro specifically for his lack of height, and Tom wanted Neuro to move.

The teenager directed him towards an old building that looked ready to collapse.

"This is it."

Tom stood by his side as he examined the abandoned building. "It looks inhabitable," Tom states, before asking. "Who do you live with?"

Neuro appears to be nervous about bringing Tom with him inside of the building. The ground floor was an empty space, full of practically nothing but dusty furniture and untouched decorum objects. They walked up the set of stairs together where finally, on the second floor was Neuro's house. There, Tom found a clean apartment that Neuro must've redecorated himself. However, it was dull and didn't have a speck of home-aspect to it. There, Tom found Neuro's mother, asleep under anaesthesia. The teenager was opening up to him, Tom realised as the women slept blissful to the world around them. Tom turned to the teenager. "Once I get an apartment of my own, you're living with me."

"W-what?" Neuro tilted his head and stuttered.

"I meant what I said. You cannot live here like this. It's no environment for a kid to grow up living in." Tom began to examine the rest of the apartment as the teenager followed him, declining his offer but Tom wasn't going to take it back. "If I get a penthouse in one of the centre buildings of the Capitol, you'll be able to have your own wing of the house with your mother - with the best doctors for her, whilst I'll get the other wing. I think it's only fair."

"But—"

Tom turned around to him. "I'm now apart of the Districts. I've

accepted where I'm headed; you've chosen the Districts as well. Now, I'm not going to let one of my allies live like this. As much as I know you don't want my help, I'm offering it. And don't think I don't get you. Harry and I are both as stubborn as the other, and neither want help, but we receive it anyway. I'm extending the offer to you." Neuro widened his eyes at Tom. "Additionally, at the Academy I'll make sure the Knights of Walpurgis don't patronise you. They can be quite harsh."

The teenager crossed his arms and glared at Tom. "I—wouldn't that be too obvious?"

"No," Tom states. "They wouldn't know you lived with me."

"Yes but like—" he bites his bottom lip. "I'm nothing. I don't need your kindness, Tom."

Tom found himself in a perplexing position. He wanted Neuro to live with him so Tom could keep him safe and keep up-to-date with the rebels in case they weren't telling him everything, additionally, so a teenager would freeze to death by himself in this cold-ass apartment.

He found himself scheming. "I don't want you to stay here tonight."

"What do you mean? It's safe here."

Began to walk towards the window where he pointed down to the large amounts of criminal activity happening outside the building. "I don't find you safe here, and I know you don't want my help but; would you accept if I take you and your mother to a place you would be safe that you wouldn't have a whole lot of association with me, at the moment? It's also closer to the Academy." Neuro peered at him, curiously.

He asked, "what do you have in mind?"

Francisca was outside the apartment with her car in less than thirty minutes, glancing around the area in disgust. Neuro bore his eyes at the Capitol women in angst whilst Tom assisted carrying his mother down the stairs alongside her machines. Tom's stylist quirk her eyebrow at the scene she found them in. "What happened now, Tom?"

"Would Neuro and his mother be able to stay at yours for a bit?" Tom asked, opening the car door and laying the women flat on her back as he ushered Neuro inside of the car. "This place isn't exactly safe for them." Francisca eyed both people in the back as Tom sat in the front

seat, turning to Neuro. “This is Francisca. She’s my stylist. Her home is quite guarded near the Capitol’s centre. You guys should be able to live safely there for the time being.”

The older woman turned to Tom. “I don’t exactly have room for extra —“

Tom smiles at her. “Neuro can take my room. His mother can take the spare room.”

Francisca sighed. “I suppose you're heading to the hospital after this?”

“Of course,” Tom agreed. “I’ve got a bed there.”

Neuro found that information intriguing. “You’re living inside of a hospital?”

Tom eyed him before deciding he should be able to tell the teenager this top-secret information. “This is a secret, okay, but I’m staying beside Harry in case something goes wrong with his recovery. He’s been unconscious ever since he’s had surgery so I’m there to make sure his well being stays high. You can have my room at Francisca’s. I’ll sleep on the couch if I must; there is always the Mansion but I’ve been avoiding it for some time now. There is always ways for me to be able to find a place to sleep.”

Neuro said nothing but the teenager, who looked as if he was about to drop, was handed a blanket from the front. Tom, watching the teenager’s expression as he was handed the blanket, smiled before turning his gaze back to Francisca who had a fond smile to her. She turned her eyes back to the road as she drove them to her apartment. Once inside, Tom assisted carrying Neuro’s mother in the elevator and to Francisca’s apartment. Neuro followed, covered in the blanket. Once inside, Francisca returned a few minutes later after parking the car; she began to reheat food for them to eat. Whilst she did that, Neuro’s mother was nicely tucked underneath the warm blankets of the spare bedrooms with the machines set up, as Tom showed Neuro around. It was a three-bedroom apartment, and Tom gestured where he would be staying to the teenager.

Once inside, Neuro took his mask off to show a jagged scar on his lip and another nicking his upper cheek bone, higher than where Harry would have his scar. The teenager appeared to be flustered at the generosity and Tom felt perplexed, unable to express his reasoning for the care as Neuro began to cry in his arms. Tom held him whilst he cried, leaning his head on top of the teenager’s—eyeing the open door

and finding Francisca staring there with a concerned expression.

As if pleading with her to save him, she made her steps known as she called to the two of them. “Dinner’s ready,” Neuro parted at the sound of her voice but still had tears drizzling down his cheeks as the woman gently touched his shoulder after making herself known.

“Come on, Neuro.” Francisca said comfortingly, knowing how to comfort people better than Tom did as Tom set aside from her. “The food is simple, pasta, so it should taste good. What toppings do you like on it?—there is—“ she went on and guided Neuro to the table as she served him. Tom got his own serving and put it inside of a container, drizzling his favourite sauce atop before putting a gentle hand to Neuro’s shoulder.

He began, “use the internet here. It’s excellent and quick.”

Writing down Tom’s phone number on a sticky note before the teenager, he passed it there as well as the password to the internet. Tom pointed to the television, “every show and movie is on it.” He pointed to the computer in the other corner of the room. “The password to the computer is here,” he pointed to the paper, “even though you have your own laptop. And we’ll get your own key set.” Francisca smiled at the two of them as she began to eat beside Neuro. “Additionally, writing things on the whiteboard lets us know what you need from the supermarket. Just let us know so we can buy it.”

Neuro was about to argue but Francisca cheered beside him. “We should also go shopping with you, Neuro, tomorrow to buy some more comfortable outfits. Since we left your home in a hurry, I’ll probably go back and help you bring some more things to the car, but buying essentials is necessary. Tonight, just relax. I’ll be very happy to watch a movie or television show with you.” She grinned. Somehow Francisca had a natural gift that was being able to calm agitated teenagers. Something Tom lacked.

Tom kissed Francisca’s cheek before heading off.

Walking towards the hospital with his bag slumped over his shoulder, he found himself settling into the hospital scenery as he strode through the main corridor of the obnoxiously bright hospital. He winced, reminded of the fourth floor of the prison, before entering Harry’s bedroom. The record Francisca last put on was still playing softly as Harry laid on the bed. Tom put his things down and took his unharmed wrist like the last time.

He fell asleep laying against the bed.

Tom spent three days out and inside of the hospital.

He would've spent more time inside if he didn't have Neuro to worry about, but the teenager was quite independent on his own, surprising him at the nearby supermarket to Francisca's apartment. Neuro held the phone up to him as if to indicate Francisca told him where he would be as he followed along with the grocery trip. The teenager took over pushing the cart as Tom glanced around to shop for the necessary groceries they would need. "How's Harry?"

Tilting his head back to the teenager who was still wearing an oversized hoodie with a dark pair of blue jeans on, he sighed, relaying various irrelevant pieces of information that didn't really matter in retrospect. "He's recovering, slowly. The worst injuries are the ones on his wrist, cheek, and shoulder. The Capitol is going to engineer a wrist glove for him to wear that will keep his wrist at a sensible temperature so it doesn't freeze. Additionally, he'll have a scar on his cheek due to the fingernail that went across his face." He put milk and eggs inside of the cart. Whilst they were in the frozen foods aisle, he went over to the ice cream section to get some for the teenager so he had something sweet to snack on. "What's your favourite flavour?"

"What's yours?" Neuro questioned. "I always took you as a mint person."

"Mint?" Tom gaped, bothered by his comment. "I like coffee like a respectable person."

"What does Harry like?—do you know?"

Tom shrugs, "I don't know. I'll take him some whilst visiting the District."

Neuro pointed at the vanilla flavour. "I like vanilla."

At the comment, Tom smirks - eyeing the teenager as he narrowed his eyebrows at him, demanding to know what he was thinking due to his expression. Tom shrugged his shoulders, grabbing a container of the vanilla ice cream. "It's very generic. For someone who is quite an oddball, you sure do like something extremely simple."

"Simplicity sometimes is the way to go, Tom." Neuro grumbles. "It's

good, try it."

Tom wrinkles his nose in disgust. "No, thank you."

The younger teenager had two dimples as he grinned and Tom found that it suited him. He began to walk over to the health and beauty aisle where Neuro followed him to. Tom pointed at the toothbrushes. "Which one do you like, pick one out for yourself." Additionally, he went over to the toothpaste and chose a simple one for Neuro. Neuro followed him after he got himself a toothbrush but stopped pushing the cart when he found something he stopped to look at. Tom's gaze followed him to find him looking at the box dyes.

He tilted his head, curious before Neuro turned back to him. "Can I buy some dye?"

Tom walked over to the dyes and glanced at the furiously brightly coloured ones. "What colour do you want to dye your hair? We could always book you an appointment with a hair stylist. Francisca probably has dyes already at her apartment."

"I know," he mumbled, "but I think it would be fun trying to dye it myself."

Neuro held the brightest blue Tom's ever seen before. "Could I dye it this colour?"

"Your entire head or just the ends of your hair."

The ends, Neuro told him, asking if Tom would be able to colour it for him. Despite thinking Francisca would be better at dying Neuro's hair for him, her being a stylist, he found himself accepting the offer. Neuro told him it would give him something other than Harry to worry about as he put two boxes inside of the cart. Tom sighed before continuing to walk down the products aisle. With a question in mind, he asked. "Does your mother have a period or is she on menopause?"

Neuro pursed his lips. "She eats enough that her periods do come around, but I don't think I've ever seen her have a period before. Her uterus must've been taken out when my sister was born."

"Your younger sister?" Tom asks, unsure if he could continue to pry. "What was her name?"

"Fermi."

Tom didn't say anything else as he grabbed a packet of large overnight pads for Neuro's mother regardless, better to be safe and sound than to be worried about it. Neuro softly smiled at the act before pushing the trolley further, speaking. "Fermi is with my father." He admits. "Back when I was younger, around ten. She was born. She must be three or four by now; but after she was born, my mother got extremely sick. My father wanted to put her down."

Grabbing deodorant, he put a masculine looking-one inside the cart for Neuro. The teenager had his lips pursed, deep in thought as Tom assisted him with shopping. "My father, my mother, and I lived together until Fermi's birth. Like I said, complications - he wanted to put her down. I think her uterus must've been taken out due to complications, but I'm not sure. This was ages ago. And, I choose to stay with her. Nobody stopped my father from abandoning me for my sister." Tom grabbed a female shampoo and conditioner because they were much better quality.

"She was extremely cute, Fermi. Had some blonde hair like me, unlike both our parents. She had blue eyes, like our mother whilst mine are green like my father's." He was stern explaining that last part. "If anything, I'll never be able to see them again."

"Your father doesn't hate you though, does he?" Tom questioned, placing the bottles into the cart.

"I don't think so." Neuro shakes his head. "I was stubborn, I didn't want my mother to die."

Tom nodded his head at the desperate teenager. "Fair enough." Turning his head away from the teenager, he felt as if his life was extremely similar to Neuro's. "My mother passed away when I was born," he told Neuro. "I was put in an orphanage because my father didn't - or knows I exist." He shrugs his shoulders as he grabs a bar of green soap. "I'll tell you all the details of the orphanage once Project R comes into play but until then, I'll only say that I didn't have anyone besides my best friend but left once Dumbledore picked me up one day."

"Your mother…"

"She named me after my father."

Neuro's face seemed to blossom into hope as the teenager beamed at him. Yes, Tom declared. Neuro might be a genius. Neuro might be able to assist the war with his capabilities - especially if it was going

to span into the next few years, where he'll be old enough to help, but he's still a kid. He felt himself familiarising himself with the teenager as Neuro opened himself up more to Tom. Like Francisca, he was going to take care of Neuro and his mother; and little sister, if they were able to find her before the war began. Neuro needed someone to be able to come for support whilst amongst the Districts, where he's never been to before. Neuro's Capitol-born, it will be hard for him. Tom's also Capitol-born but older and has more connections. He's going to have to support him, he found, since nobody else amongst the rebels seemed keen to.

Oh well. That was something he was willing to do.

Later that afternoon, he was in Francisca's apartments' bathroom as Neuro sat on a chair they brought into the room so they could do his hair. Completely wet, Tom asked Francisca for a dye brush as he began to apply the sea-blue dye to his hair. Francisca leaned against the open door as she watched Tom do a complicated task he's never done before. She laughs alongside Neuro who is watching a movie whilst Tom keeps patting down the hair with dye. "I still can't believe you guys brought box dye. It's never going to come out, unless you bleach or cut your hair off." Francisca groans, jokingly. "Oh well, how are you going Tom?"

"I think I'm almost done," he tells her.

"It looks good." Neuro smiles at him.

"Of course it looks good," Tom rolls his eyes at the kid. "I'm the one doing it."

Francisca snorts at the comment and brings back fruit for the two of them to snack on. The real hero, Tom found, was his stylist. Out of anyone that Tom knows, none of them would host him - and two other people besides him, who he brought along with him. Nobody but Francisca. Tom was going to make sure she was safe from the war, no matter what Tom did.

Helping Neuro rinse his hair, Tom found that it took a couple of washes before no more dye bled from his hair. Then, they blow-dried his hair and it was a curly masterpiece. Tom stared at Neuro's hair in the mirror. It wasn't perfect, some parts were longer than others, but the teenager was extremely happy with the final product.

Francisca entered the bathroom. “Now that looks good. Great work, Tom. Maybe I should hire you.”

Tom rolled his eyes and put the stained gloves into the bin.

Heading back out to the hospital, he returned late that night without anything changing in Harry’s condition except that his lungs were becoming better.

———

Tom headed over to the Blacks’ apartment, invited to the 74th Annual Hunger Games After-party.

Neuro and Francisca glanced over his suit and tie before he left, both agreeing with the combination of colours - Tom walking down the street and to their apartment smoothly. A lot of people were waiting outside, the Blacks knowing a lot of people, as the roof was blasting with music. Able to gain access quickly, Tom found himself amongst Bella, Narcissa, Lucius, Nott, Evans, and Lestrange as they hung around the infinity pool of the apartment building.

Narcissa and Tom were the only two who sat on the ledge of the pool with their legs dangling in the water - as their shoes were tucked behind the pool chairs protectively. The rest swam as the few Avoxes the family were granted, brought them drinks and finger-meals. Tom and Narcissa drank cocktails and clinked their glasses together as money was forwarded to his bank account due to the winnings of his bet. Tom was going to transfer the money to Harry’s bank account once he left the party.

The teenager hummed beside him as Tom watched the others swim and party, in spite of the storm brewing. She turned to him. “How have you been, Tom?”

“I’ve been alright, what about you, Narcissa?”

“It’s been okay. I’m glad school is almost over for the summer.”

“If Harry doesn’t wake up in the next week, we’ll have an extra long holiday,” Narcissa also tells him. She pulls a whitish-blonde curl behind her ear. “What are your plans for the holidays?” She asked him. They didn’t start school until early October.

Tom considered telling her about his plans to visit District 12. “I was considering this year, like last when you, Bella, Lucius, Lestrange, and

I went to District 1, we go to District 12. Since we've got special access, I was contemplating going for a month during September when the air's cooler."

Narcissa pursed her lips. "Would we stay on the train this time?"

"It depends," Tom debated. "They don't have visitation housing."

The woman nods her head, observing Tom with interested eyes. Tom knew she suspected things between Harry and him as well, but she didn't say it outright which Tom was glad about. The teenager turned her head instantaneously to her older sister when Bella splashed the both of them. "Uh," Tom's eyes widened - suit entirely wet and Narcissa's dress drench as the two of them glared at Bella. Bella only smirked, smug, and Lestrange grabbed Tom's legs whilst Lucius grabbed Narcissa's. "Oh no you don't." Tom puts his cocktail glass down.

Lestrange pulled Tom into the water as he held his legs and Tom gave an exasperated sigh in annoyance before turning to Narcissa who had murder on her mind, glaring at her sister. Splashing the water towards Narcissa to gain her attention, she turned her head at him and they locked eyes, nodding at each other. Tom was able to get away from Lestrange but then began to splash him and Bella. "Oh, Tom!" Bella shouted at him.

He was still in his pristine suit without another change of colours as he absolutely saturated Lestrange, Bella, and Lucius with the help of Narcissa. They moved back to where they were previously sitting, winning the war as Tom went back to drinking his cocktail. Narcissa laughed beside him but Tom was pissed he was now sitting in wet clothes, but he supposed life could be worse. He was going to get revenge on the three of them, in spite of this.

Narcissa and Tom left to clean up and Tom was given a large, white shirt from Narcissa's father to wear, along with a pair of pants. He showered in Narcissa's bathroom, Narcissa going to grab his clean underwear from the drawer the sisters had compiled of clothes in case one of their beaus didn't have clean clothes to leave the house in, and returned with clean underwear. Putting the shirt, pants, and underwear on; he didn't bother to tidy his hair as waited for Narcissa to return from the bathroom. Returning, wearing bathrobes, he turned his head to gaze out the window as she changed. Tom told her. "Where would the best penthouse apartment be around the centre besides yours?"

“Thinking of moving now, are you, Tom?” She joked around but Tom hummed.

“Oh,” she paused. “You’d want the one across the road, perhaps. When are you thinking of moving out?”

“Around my eighteenth. I was thinking the Mansion was a bit lonesome, and a penthouse would be freeing.” The youngest Black sister agreed and told him he was allowed to turn around, Tom finding Narcissa wearing a soft lavender dress that went with her aesthetic. It was silk and woven with pearls, Tom telling her it looked well and worked with the occasion. “Additionally, I was thinking I’d be able to do more duties as the President’s successor out of the President’s grasp, if you get what I mean?”

“Like independence? No, I get it.”

Narcissa did her skincare before putting moisturiser on Tom’s face, neck, and collarbones before redoing her own makeup. They spent some time in Narcissa’s bedroom, refining their looks after being bombarded by Bella, Lucius, and Lestrange like they were in the pool, and returned back down the stairs and into the living room where they mingled with the rest of the guests. Tom spoke to the two Black parents and conversed with them about the Capitol and businesses for a few minutes before returning to Narcissa who suggested they, including Bella, Lucius, Lestrange—Nott, Evans, and Barty who were somewhere, should watch a movie.

They headed down to the theatre room they had and turned on the projector before Bella, Lucius, and Lestrange slowly made their way there, Bella picking the opposite seat besides Tom - with Lestrange to her right as Lucius chose the seat opposite to Tom to be beside Narcissa. Narcissa was able to find Nott, Evans, and Barty and they sat in the row above them.

Then, they began to watch the thriller movie Tom and Narcissa purposefully put on to scare the absolute shit out of all of them. Revenge, they clicked their knuckles together quietly with succession as the screams were horrendously loud as another jump-scare occurred. The door creaked open and Tom turned his head to see Andromeda standing at the top of the stairs. She smirked, before pressing a finger against her lips as she watched the movie from a distance. Tom went back to observing the movie in curiosity and laughter whilst the rest of the teenagers screamed beside him.

Narcissa and Tom were immune to the jump-scares; Bella loved horror but was unable to stand jump-scares. Everyone was much the same but it meant Narcissa and Tom got their petty revenge.

Leaving the Blacks' apartment, Tom nodded to himself.

Sometimes Tom had to take the initiative for himself; he was independent and clever. He was allowed to move out when he was eighteen. It wasn't as if he was seven.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 18, I'm having a month hiatus then I'll be back April/May
I'm also posting chapter 16 today but I've got to edit it first
Lots of love, me
Up next, "Call It What You Want"
P S

Call It What You Want & I Think He Knows

Chapter Notes

Posted: 17th of March, 2024

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tom knew Harry's birthday was on the 31st.

What was irritating was that Harry was still asleep and Tom wouldn't be able to share it with him. As a result, he decided to give him a lot of presents instead in the days leading up to the 31st. Neuro and Francisca came with him when shopping for simple things he would need back in 12. A mattress; blankets; pillows; furniture—amongst other things. Then, Tom began to search for personalised items Harry could take back with him. Francisca had begun to design their necklaces so that was her birthday present to Harry, but Tom wanted to make his special. Deciding to shop for jewellery, he brought Harry a golden bracelet he would be able to wear. Additionally, Tom found other simple things like electronics, something he wanted Harry to have inside of his house as well; incase he wouldn't be able to communicate on his phones.

With those electronics came a weather monitor so he would be able to tell what weather was on the horizon, and found hunting equipment for him to take back to 12 - knowing how he travelled beyond the fence with his friends. He bought heaters and clothes for Harry; practically giving him a whole lot of things that were beneficial.

A lot of the things he brought were sent back to District 12 so when he got there, he would be able to sort through it all but he wanted Harry to have some of his things. Like hoodies, a few pieces of jewellery of Tom's, his favourite blanket, and a few personal items of Tom's so he would be reminded of him. Tom spent the past week scrolling through the internet and searching for photos of them when they were kids, and Tom was able to find three. Three together. Two of Harry, by himself in the Capitol, and five of Tom when he was in the orphanage. He put them into an album and wrote: "thought of home" in one of the pages with the two of them.

Francisca gushed over the photos and thought they were adorable. She added the photo she captured of Harry in his bed in the hospital, Tom captioning it: "looking after you" and Francisca began to find other

photos of Tom to put in there. After putting a couple from events to school to being around the Mansion to being together - Francisca wrote: “baby Tom.” Tom rolled his eyes but kept it in because he knew Harry found it funny. Neuro became curious about the book and asked if he could be involved so Tom, Neuro, and Francisca all took a photo together and Tom wrote a note longer: “Neuro wanted to be involved with this, ergo the photo. I’ll tell you about him soon. You’ll adore him. I’m protecting you whilst you're asleep, Harry. Know I always will.”

Leaving some blank photos at the back of the album, Tom wrote: “we’ll add more - I’ve got some upcoming plans that will allow us to. Additionally, I want to give you a camera so you can take photos of 12 and put your friends in here. Happy Birthday, Harry.”

Tom put the photo album inside of the drawer beside Harry’s hospital bed and Francisca finally had created both necklaces she said she would. Tom had his own, and Francisca clipped Harry’s on as the light material hung from his neck. It was his birthday and Tom didn’t leave his side once.

That night, he slept and a song he began to like listening to was on the album, Lillies by the Marauders. It was called Adoration and whilst it was playing, Tom could see Harry’s face soften ever-so slightly. He held onto Harry’s hand and slept beside his bed and the next day he was kicked out. Dr. Kulkarni told him it was because Harry needed to have another short surgery with his shoulder and that he would be back after a few hours. When Harry returned, Tom went back to the record player and turned it back on with the Marauders playing and almost immediately did Harry’s facial features relaxed. Tom sat back by his side.

Francisca convinced him to sleep back at her apartment for the night.

———

The next morning, waking up from the couch, he noticed Neuro beside him - beginning to play the video games Tom and Francisca brought him. From the couch, he watched him win against the other people playing against him in the Capitol. He was strategically clever; winning ten times.

“Do you want to try?” Neuro asked when he grew bored.

“I’ve never been inclined to play video games.”

“That doesn’t matter.” The teenager rolls his eyes. “You could try.”

He passed the controller into Tom’s hands and he found himself to be struggling to play and understand all the buttons on the controller at the beginning. It was until he began to be able to win against the other players in the game that he began to like it. Neuro cheered him on when he won his first match, but Tom grew bored of the game and passed it back to the teenager. “I’m going to make us breakfast. What would you like to eat?”

“Could I have pancakes?”

Tom agreed and began to make the mixture before pouring the batter into the pan. Whilst one of the pancakes cooked, he washed the dishes of the previous meals they’ve had in the house to help Francisca from doing it all herself. She was out with a client and Tom turned the pancake. Neuro kept playing his video game. Once he was done, he served the pancake on a plate to Neuro’s delight. “Thank you,” he cooed and ate it with maple syrup.

Instead of pancakes, he made himself a small bowl of fruit salad and ate it on the couch beside the teenager who switched the television to be a movie instead. They watched it together and Tom was becoming more friendly with Neuro. Washing up the plates, Neuro went back to playing the video game whilst Tom smoked a cigarette out the side of the building. Breathing in and out, he wondered how much longer Harry would be unconscious for as he waited.

And waited.

And waited.

And waited.

Then, he got a phone call. “He’s awake?”

Harry woke up in a haze.

There was a loud silence before panic erupted in his ears and people were talking to him - which he was barely able to answer - and pain injected into his body. Then, someone spoke and it all went silent again as his eyes opened up wider. He felt drowsy and someone took his hand beside him. Turning to the familiar warmth, he saw dark hair and brown eyes; perfection, staring back at him. “Harry?” He

whispered his name. “Are you okay? How are you feeling?”

“I—“ his throat clenched in pain. He groaned, a soft wet towel being placed onto his head.

“It’s okay, Harry.” He heard Tom tell him. “Your throat is a little bruised. But besides that, everything is going to be okay. You just have a lot of injuries to recover from is all.” He has his glasses returned to him and he blinks to find Tom crying beside him. Lifting his hand towards his face, he cupped Tom’s face and stroked the tears from his eyes with little to no issues. Harry felt empty, with the exception of pain as Tom leaned forward into his hand before taking his wrist and holding his hand. “Happy birthday.”

Harry passed out again.

———

The next he woke up, he felt a lot better.

The dizziness that was in his system had passed; his vision was clear; the warmth of Tom’s hand in Harry’s was comforting; everything in his body cooled. He laid up against the hospital bed with relief. He was presented with three different doctors as they began to recite his injuries and long-term issues. Harry took one glance at his right wrist before he glared and winced at the phantom pain. The doctors said it was normal but he felt ill at the thought. Tom stroked his other wrist to keep him in the bed, and relaxed. He did underneath the sensation of Tom’s hand.

Francisca sat on the other side of Harry’s bed. “It’s good to see you awake, Harry.”

“T-thank you.” He told her, throat is still recovering. “How—how is everything?”

“Ah, nothing bad has happened. You’ve been out for two weeks though.”

“Ready for home?” She asked him.

Harry hummed, body still latching onto the pain killers that were pumping into his body. At least this time it wasn’t a dose that made him pass out as he blinked, wondering. Harry turned to Tom, who didn’t turn away from him once. He asked. “It’s not over is it? I’ve still —still got to do meetings with Barty Jr, don’t I? And—and the award

ceremony."

"Yes," Tom agreed sadly. "But not until you're ready for home."

"You'll be here until they're ready to discharge you," Francisca smiles.

Harry allows them to do the thinking as his eyes shut underneath the enormous weight they were carrying, when he woke up again, his hand was around his neck fiddling with a necklace that was there. Lifting the necklace up, eyes lighter, he found a black and gold necklace hanging by his neck. Harry didn't know who it belonged to but turned his gaze to Tom who was asleep on Harry's lap. Reaching down with his left hand, he began to fiddle with his soft hair whilst drowsily concentrated on the goodness of the world. Harry felt sick all of a sudden, startling awake and turning his head to the side of the bed and vomiting. Tom woke up at the sound. "A-are you alright, Harry?"

A nurse came in and began to clean up the mess as a doctor glanced over his vitals and injuries to make sure it wasn't caused because of any particular reason. Harry winced in pain, noticing the lack of painkiller in his system as he gritted his teeth. "Still in pain?" The main doctor questioned. "I think we're going to have to up the dose for a few hours until you get used to weaning off the medicines." She patted his head before injecting his body with more painkillers.

Once loopy, he exhales - no longer finding the pain to be distracting.

He sat there, hand in Tom's again as he stared at him concernedly, before passing out.

Third time's the charm when he woke up to find the world slowing to adjust to his presence.

Tom was awake and Francisca was by his right side, the trio all relaxing at the notion that he was awake. Harry didn't know how many hours or days had passed by but he was relaxing to the sound of the familiar music that was playing in the background.

Until, he heard the musical lyrics, gaping. "Lady Miller, such a killer. Always running-up that hill. Dancing to tunes, blasting the blues, never seein' the river. You and me, a mystery, my inner-mirror. Tell me no, say so, and I'll go. Oh Lady Miller, you're such a killer. Dashing through the snow. Never say hello. Always putting on the biggest show. Come to the bar, where things are far, and I'm plucking my guitar. Lady Miller, such a thriller; my biggest silver. With you and

me, we'll be a mystery, and win aplenty of victories. Be killers together, run nights forever, and beat all the bad weathers. Lady Miller, take the pillar. My heart never differs."

Harry has never heard of his father's voice before but instinctively, he knew who sung the lyrics of the songs the Marauders wrote before him. His father. He cried at the sound of his father - who in comparison to Harry was meant to sing Lady Miller. It was the voice his mother had fallen in-love with. Tom appeared panicked at his sudden crying.

He took his stronger arm and stroked it comfortingly.

It still didn't stop Harry from sobbing.

It took all night for Harry to stop instantaneously crying at the sound of his father's voice but due to his request, Tom was sitting beside him as Harry leaned back against his chest, looking up to the ceiling as he let the music overcome him. There were ten songs on the album, Lillies, Frank told him. Harry knew them all: By The River, Work, Her & I, Lady Miller, Hate me, Boy, Worship, Pomegranate, Vicious, and Marauders. His mother never sang, it was infamous in the bar that she would always watch his father as he performed beside Sirius, with Lupin who were all obsessed with making District 12 the happiest it could be.

They wrote five albums in total. The first one, Lillies. The second one, D12. The third one, Son. The fourth and fifth albums; his parents weren't alive to sing nor write for. Instead, once he returned to District 12 - he helped the Marauders return to what they once were. Beautiful performers. Like his mother, a lot of the lyrics came from him, and like his father, he sung a lot of the songs - unless he could find someone better to sing them. The first album Harry wrote was called, Dusk, which had ten different singers. Fred and George did a duo for the opening song because Harry asked them if they wanted to. Alwilda, a girl from the Merchants, sang the second and third song. Harry asked Charlie if he wanted to sing, but he turned it down so instead, Harry asked Frank and Alice's son, Neville, if he wanted to take the part and he did. The choice was an excellent one. Sybill was the best singer out of her siblings so she was asked and accepted the part in the album, singing with two other younger kids. Six and nine respectively.

Then, Harry asked Hermione's mother, Eva, to sing and he found her voice to be perfect. Harry sang only one song in the album - then for

another, asked if the Marauders could all have different parts. Then, deciding after a while of contemplating the last two songs, Neville's younger sister, Scarlet sang. She was a beautiful singer like Neville.

So the songs in Dusk were finalised: One or Two?, Fatefully, Misery, The Pedestal, Children, Home, These Places, We're Filth, Secret Island, and Vengeance.

It took longer to write Harry's second album: Choking Coal-dust.

He wanted to speak of darker topics - and he was fifteen when it came to fruition. There were only seven songs on the album but it wasn't hard to choose the singers on the album. Scarlet sang the first two songs. Neville sang the second song. Eva sang the third. Harry sang the fourth. Alwilda sang the final two songs. Titled as so: Broken, War, Diamond Findings, What Rebels, All for the Game, My Life, and Bodies.

Harry turned onto his stomach and wrapped both of his aching arms around Tom who kept stroking his curly hair. He was going home. The realisation sunk to the pit of his stomach as he laid against Tom's chest, close to his heart. After everything, he was going home. He was a victor. He was District 12's second victor ever. He blinked before he began to sob. As if all the tension in his body had evaporated, he cried out of relief. He was going home. Tom was alive. He was alive.

"Do you want more of the albums, Harry?" Tom's head tilted down at him.

His eyes were memorising. The deep brown that reminded Harry of the woods; the sharp cheekbones that sculptures would cut their hands on; the demeaning eyes that softened only for him; his delicate words that were honeyed with care; his cream-skin that never had a single blotch on it; the burn of honesty behind his eyes. Everything about Tom made Harry want him more. The tone of his words, the thought behind his words, the curve of how he said his words. It was addicting. However, Harry was smarter - and realised the trust Tom bestowed him; his touch. Arms wrapped around his waist, protectively, the closeness of their faces, the connection of chests— Harry inhaled, shuttering. Tom was going to be the death of him.

"Y-yes. Any. Please."

"Of course."

———

Tom doesn't leave until the next morning to find more records.

Asleep, with Francisca to look over him, Harry wakes up and he's fed broth to help his stomach adjust to solids after taking out the eating tube and catheter - which were both painful processes. Francisca held his hand for both. By the time eleven came around, he needed to go to the bathroom which was a struggle in itself. Francisca assisted him walking but it took over thirty minutes for him to take a piss because he wasn't used to standing. The male doctor carried him back to bed where the nurses came back and fed him more broth.

It wasn't until late afternoon when Tom returned.

He appeared flustered and embarrassed but gifted Harry two more albums. "The clerk at the store was surprised I knew the Marauders but said the last copy of the albums he gave to a woman I knew, so I asked her for them. She said these were yours. Although, it took forever to copy the records onto two other devices so we had additional copies of the songs incase something happened to these." Harry's eyes watered, "we wanted to be able to preserve the songs and your parents legacy."

"Oh Tom," he wiped his tears, Harry hugging the teenager, leaning most of his body weight onto him. "My parents."

"Yeah, I know. They would be proud of you."

It's random. The crying.

Harry didn't cry a lot before. And it certainly was sporadically like this when he did. Out of everyone, despite the nervousness Tom has whilst comforting him - as if one wrong move would tick him off, Harry found Tom's methods at comfort to be the best. Always. They didn't need to talk about his feelings. They didn't need to ask what was okay and what wasn't. They knew, instinctively, engraved into their muscles. Their thoughts. Their blood. They were natural with one another. Tom, despite both of them knowing it wasn't the best for him, leaned onto the bed and began to manoeuvre Harry so he was able to hold him. Harry felt a fuzzy feeling in his stomach as his head rested against his chest. Knowing Tom was life - that he was alive, was one of the best birthday presents he's ever received.

He didn't fall asleep, he wasn't exhausted enough for it despite emotionally being overloaded. Around six o'clock his speech therapist came around and Harry had to depart from Tom's chest to lift his throat to the specialist. He didn't know his name, he didn't want to

know. All he did was follow what the man asked - checking the bruising on his throat. “The swelling has come down significantly. Have you tried to talk in the past two days?”

“Yes,” he said slowly.

“How much?”

“Not a lot.”

“Good,” he let go of his throat. “Despite looking better, it still is healing on the inside. But I want you to keep practicing speaking so it gets used to the workload again. Just keep doing your usual business but no singing or overextending the use of your voice, okay?” Harry agreed, humming, and the specialist left them with an ice-pack in the refrigerator outside in case they needed to use it.

Afterwards, Harry curled back, face in Tom’s chest. His wrist ached and as a result, Harry hissed in pain. He sat up, using his left wrist to assist him as well as Tom’s arms. “Are you alright?” He asked before realising the pressure was on it. Tom helped him turn so he was on his back instead.

Then, Tom wrapped his arms around his chest protectively.

Francisca told them she had to leave due to a party she had to be at and Harry passed out. When he woke up again, he needed to go to the bathroom and cursed the position he was in. Slowly getting up, unable to use his right side of his body, and with his fractured ankle - Harry began to hobble towards the bathroom, hoping Tom stayed asleep.

Instead, he landed face first onto the ground. He shrieked in pain.

Tom, instantaneously, woke up. “H-Harry—Harry?” He shouted, panicked.

“It’s okay,” he tried to say but he couldn’t get up from the ground.

Practically, leaping off the bed, Tom hurried over to him. “Are you okay? What—what happened?”

Tom took Harry from underneath his shoulders and lifted him to his feet gently, but Harry had to use Tom’s body weight as assistance to stand. “Tripped… sorry.” He winced and Tom helped him to the bathroom where he sat on the toilet, unable to use it otherwise. After he was done with his business, covered - despite that not mattering - being in the literal Hunger Games, Tom returned and appeared pissed

at him. Tom began, “if you need something; ask, Harry. It’s not a burden to ask me for help, okay? I care about you.”

Flushing at the comments, he was helped up from the toilet where he then washed his hands at the sink and left the bathroom, all carried by Tom’s arms. He was against Tom’s chest again but so his right side was above his side. He curled around his body like a snake and peacefully laid there. “I know, Tom. But I—I feel useless.”

“Useless?” Tom paused. “You’re the least useless person I know.”

“You beat the Hunger Games; you gave peaceful deaths; you enchanted the Capitol; you—I think made me a better person—“ Tom inhaled before tilting his head down at Harry who was looking up at him with his bandaged cheek leaning against his chest. His eyes watered again; Tom’s expression, face became redder. “Harry, people are inspired because of you. Do not ever think you’re useless. I’m not protecting you because you're weak or useless; I’m protecting you because sometimes people are vulnerable. Fuck, I know I am.”

He strokes his curls which makes Harry blush.

“Francisca cares; is protective of you, but I’ll have you know she’s weaker than you at everything. Those doctors care; but what you did, mending your own injuries in the Hunger Games is all the more powerful, clever, and mind-blowing than any procedure they’ll ever do.” Tom kisses his forehead. “Everyone in the Capitol cares about you; but I’ll have you know, they don’t have the inch of intelligence to match yours. The Districts appreciate you; and I’ll have you know, they’ll wear your name, your face, your actions as a badge of honour. You make me weak, Harry.”

Tom laughs softly, fondness on his face; tears in Harry’s. “I like that about me because of you. I don’t think I’d ever let anyone make me weak like you do.”

Harry leans into his chest. “That’s us.”

“Yes,” he nods - Harry feeling the grumble of his stomach. “It is.”

Harry begins his physical therapy the next day. Tom is on his bed, legs-crossed, watching and encouraging him as he slowly walks on his fractured ankle in its boot. Additionally, he did therapy with his right shoulder joint and had to practice carrying things in his hand due to

the strain of the veins and muscles in his wrist. It was extremely difficult and precarious at first.

Afterwards, he took a nap with his head on Tom's lap as he ate lunch.

Francisca was there to keep him company as the two discussed matters beyond Harry.

When Harry woke up again, he was met with the sight of Morgan, Rhodes, and Bonavich around his hospital room. He leaned his chest against Tom's left arm, bandaged cheek against Tom's shoulder. The women smirked in Harry's direction. "In a couple of days, three—maybe four, you'll be discharged and paraded around the Capitol to celebrate your victory. You may choose crunches or a wheelchair, but either way; we've got to make you look dashing."

"Prince Charming," Bonavich turns to Tom. "Don't mind us kidnapping Cinderella for a moment due you?"

"If you don't hurt him and I'm able to watch him within catching distance, nothing should be a problem." Tom tells them. Harry notices that his braid, which he did in his hair over two and a half weeks ago, still hung to the side of his face. Tom tucked it behind his ear, whispering. "You looked fantastic with the braid. I should learn so I can do it for you."

Harry laughed softly, cheeks aching as he manoeuvred his body with the assistance of Tom. The stylists watched him, Francisca sitting in the hospital chair behind the three. Morgan hums. "I can totally see you wearing a wheel-chair and letting the Capitol do the rest of the work," she admits and looks up to the both of them. "What do you think? Punish another Capitol citizen."

"If it makes Harry feel better, then yes." Tom turns to him. "What do you think?"

"It's probably best," he sighs, bothered.

Tom eyes him as if he could read his mind and he shrugged his shoulder, not bothering to attempt with his injured one. He didn't want to make it worse. Rhodes turned to Francisca, then back to Harry. "I'm loving the necklaces. Harry's wear is definitely worth keeping. Did you make it yourself, Franci?" The Capitol-man chuckled. "They're brilliant but perfect."

Morgan nodded her head in agreement. "They're quite

complementary. Intrinsic. Yes, they'll stay."

"Even for me?" Tom comments, sarcastically.

Harry smiles softly at the jest.

"Of course. Your image matters as well."

It's mind-numbing, relaxing to know he has people who were kind like Tom and Francisca; allies like Morgan, Rhodes, and Bonavich in the Capitol. Until Sirius, and the rest of District 12—these people have stuff to lose being associated with him. Harry is kissed the most delicately on his bandaged cheek by Tom who says he's still 'a beauty'. It makes butterflies flutter in his stomach as he clenches, moves close to Tom. Everything about Tom is perfection; obsessively. He knows it's wrong but with the way Tom looks at him, and the way Harry wants to absorb him; he thinks they work well together.

Quiet, rainy mornings accompany the two of them.

The windows have curtains covering them but the early nights lead them to have early mornings where the two lie around, basking in each other's warmth, Harry kissing his jaw and neck; Tom his forehead and cheek, the two of them recovering together by using each other for their own selfish reasons. They were both possessive and as obsessed with each other as one another. Tom holding his waist, Harry holding his wrist with his good hand, staring and looking down at the doctors as they entered - a woman Tom had as a professor at his school showed up. Her name was Babbling. Tom whispered into his ear, pressing into his hair: "she won't say a word about us."

"Mhm," he hums. "We'll see."

The two eye her as she takes a seat beside the hospital bed. Mrs. Babbling, she introduced herself to Harry as, smiled softly at the two of them - eyeing their extremely close positions. She began, "Tom." Harry gripped his hand a little tenser at the direct point she was getting at. "You and Harry - what's your status?"

Silence overlapped the room. Harry didn't turn to Tom nor did Tom overbear his presence more to Harry that what he was previously doing. They gave Mrs. Babbling a harsh and judgemental expression. Harry began. "I've only just returned from the Hunger Games. I think it would be unwise for my mental state to speak about such things so personal, Mrs. Babbling."

“Oh yes, of course.” She pursed her lips and her eyes narrowed in thought. “I was only wondering if this codependency was new or old, is all.”

“Codependency?” Harry posed; knowing exactly that it was. Except, with the amount they were both connected and depending on the other - they were both picking up the slack for the other. “I’m traumatised - and I want physical touch that doesn't harm.” He began slyly, he didn’t need a therapist to determine how he wanted to live his life once he survived it. “Growing up, I didn’t have a stable home. My parents were dead and I lived under different peoples’ care at 12. Not all of it was good,” which again wasn’t a lie but not the entire truth. Harry was excellent at deflecting - a skill he mastered mere months ago. “Tom has been nothing but good to me ever since the assistance with mentoring,” he lied - going on with Tom’s initial lie with the Capitol. “I don’t think it’s necessary to speak more of why I want to be touched gently, is it?”

Mrs. Babbling observed and studied the two of them calculatingly. As if she was trying to determine what she would get out of this. In the end, she calmly stated. “You seem very smart, Harry.” She purses her lips. “I’d say you’d thrive if you were Capitol-born at the Academy. Additionally, I’d also like to say that over-studying trauma and analysing all your problems is another trauma in itself. Bliss is peaceful. Knowledge is pain. Perhaps, you’d like to extend upon that?”

“Unlike you, luxury-born Capitol-citizens. I don’t have the luxury to be blissful.” Harry states outright. “Knowledge is also power; and I would’ve died in the arena if I didn’t. Perhaps, because you’ve never had to fight for your life before - you wouldn’t know; but starving, freezing, burning, and fearing for your life because a fancy, luxurious Capitol-citizen might pull your name out of a bowl — you’d think it’s the best option. Maybe, it is. But for me, I don’t get that luxury. I never will. Shut up about the bullshit that this will make me better.”

“You don’t need to think of survival anymore,” she tells him.

“Doesn’t mean I won’t. It’s ingrained into my scars, my body, my dreams, my nightmares, my friends, my family, my community, my home; everything, everyone, everywhere, all at once is not going to forget - not stop me from thinking - wake up scarred with more pains - more frightening demons - that you will ever think to conquer. Prisoners; a prison; they called it?” Referring to the arena. “It’s right. For the name. I will never leave it. So you’re stupid for telling to do so.”

Harry murmurs. “Capitol-thinking, am I right?”

Tom pressed a soft kiss to his curls. “Of course.”

Mrs. Babbling gets nowhere with him.

She leaves frustrated at the end of their apparent session and the nurses grab food for him to eat. Softer solids and afterwards, he falls asleep. Harry wasn’t sure where he wanted to take his relationship with Tom. He knew they were more than friends; probably more than lovers; but the motivation that once lied deep inside of his veins tricking, quickly whenever Tom showed affection and love, hadn’t vanished but dimmed. Due to winning the Hunger Games, he no longer had to rush their relationship nor slow them down. However, being in the hospital to demonstrate the change was bothersome. Harry kept craving for his touch and as if like honey, Tom kept sticking to him. In actuality, he didn’t think words needed to be spoken for them to understand their dynamic now. They just knew.

Harry was turned to the side on Tom’s lap. It was another early morning and the curtains were drawn, Francisca was nowhere to be seen. Tom was awake, and so was he. It was the perfect time. Leaning forward, Tom’s cheeks reddening at the action, he used his left hand to manoeuvre his chin downward so it was in a better position. Harry felt his eyelashes flutter nervously. “Can I kiss you?”

Tom gulped, Harry watching the way his Adams’ apple bobbed at the question. It didn’t take long to get an answer. “Of course.” Harry initiated the kiss, pressing his lips to Tom’s. Parting, Harry began to kiss his cheek, lowering his body so he would be able to kiss him underneath his jaw, and his Adams’ apple that was staring at him teasingly. Tom groaned at the adjustment, Harry putting the majority of his weight on him as Tom held him on his right side so he wouldn’t fall. Harry begins to murmur. “The epitome of Aphrodite’s son.”

The teenager tilts Harry’s chin up from where he was leaning into his neck, his own chest pressed up against his. “Harry,” Tom mumbled, and he pressed his lips into his. They spent the majority of their morning, kissing and touching each other, soft things that genuinely made Harry feel better about himself. To stabilise him, he was kept in Tom’s lap and he was glad to know most of the kissing caused them both to get slightly hard.

Kissing—no, making-out with Tom was everything that Harry imagined it would be. Addictive, possessive, obsessive with one

another. Wanting to consume everything the other offered; and giving up themselves for the other to consume. The bleeding trust they put into each other was unmatched. Never has Harry ever felt like this for someone else. Kissing was gentle, protective, wanting. A question for if the other is okay. To remind them they were okay.

Making-out was chasing the sensation of consuming everything the other had to offer whilst kissing was a statement, question, and another adoration for each other's affections. Likewise, the touches that didn't include kissing were just as special. Harry leaned on his chest whilst Tom had his arms wrapped around him, listening to his heartbeats, comforted. "Hey, Tom." Harry murmured. "I don't think I've ever loved someone the way I love you."

He presses a kiss to his jaw.

Tom holds him more protectively; and Harry likes that.

He wasn't wrong when he said that comforting touch he craved. Back when they were little kids, they slept together in the same bed because the two of them only wanted to be touched without a fist being blown to their eye, or being bitten, or having another bad thing happen to them. This was them; this was the touch Harry craved for years. They were going through withdrawal symptoms and feeding into their addiction again.

The nurses served pomegranates.

On Friday, he was discharged and brought back to Morgan's apartment where he would stay with Tom. Unfortunately, they had to go in two different cars because neither of them wanted to get more evidence piled against them for Dumbledore to find. He was in a wheelchair and ignored all the flashes of lights of the people who wanted to see him. Morgan pushed his wheelchair into the apartment building. Tom entered around the back exit.

The teenager noticed Tom, he began to push the wheelchair towards his direction and Tom paused in front of him, taking Harry's arms and carrying him. He leaned his head against Tom's head as Morgan sighed. "Are you two love birds going to keep doing this?" She questioned. "Every minute of the day you've got to be close to each other, don't you."

Rhodes rolls his eyes at their dramatics. "It's young love; let them be,

Morgs."

"But they're spending too much time outside when they could be in the apartment settling down."

"Okay," Harry began. "We're sorry."

Morgan rolled her eyes. She let them into her apartment and the stylists entered before they did. Harry had wrapped his legs around Tom's waist so it was easier to carry him, and by no means was he a light person in general. The two found the nearest couch and began to cuddle on it. The four stylists all have to take a moment to breathe in and out to be able to deal with their antics. Francisca purses her lips, bemused. "We've got to get you dressed and prepared for tomorrow."

"What is happening tomorrow?" He asked.

Morgan slaps a hand to her forehead. "We told you both thirty minutes ago. Were you not—no, I won't even ask that. Of course, you weren't listening; to be distracted, not being together, weren't you. Gosh." She shook her head. "What are we going to do once you have to return to 12. This one," she points to Tom, "will be in withdrawal. You'll be in withdrawal by yourself. This is going to be hell, I tell you guys."

"There's no need for such theatricals, Morgan." Bonavich smirks. "Electrics will be able to connect the two addicts."

"Yes," Harry agrees but complains, nonetheless, "but I won't actually be able to feel him." The adults groan and the two teenagers only laugh at their misery. They begin to style Harry whilst sitting down, fitting him into various clothes whilst Tom watches and judges the colours and styles on him. Again, the one thing they all wanted to keep was the braid in his hair. Francisca holds the braid calculatingly. "It works. Amongst all the curls, the braid gives everyone something to look at." She begins to put oils into his hair that makes it shimmer.

Morgan cleanses his face, avoiding the bandaged cheek, and begins to soften his skin. He was led to the bathroom where the stylists drew him a warm bath, and Tom took a seat beside the tub where there was room to sit. They took off his glasses; ending up nude in the tub, bothered by the amount they were washing and getting rid of all the specks of dirt, dust, and remnants of blood. Harry was oiled to the point where he felt slippery trying to get out of the tub.

Tom wrapped him in a robe and assisted him, his boot wet as he was

placed on a chair inside of the bathroom. Harry felt cleansed beyond belief before Tom planted a soft kiss to his hair, hugging him before taking his spot, leaning up against the bathroom counter-top. Morgan eyed his bandaged cheek. “How long did they say you needed to keep this bandage on?”

“It won’t be pretty underneath,” Harry tells them. “Uh, I think I can take it off now so long as it moisturises it gently and puts another bandage back on with antibiotics. It won’t heal fully until New Years, I don’t think.”

“Huh,” she murmurs. “Let’s see what’s underneath, shall we?”

Tom and Harry both took a serious glance at each other. Tom turned his gaze to Morgan. “His cheek is going to be quite red and angry; I suggest if anything, we take it off, and put a skin-coloured bandage on so it matches with his skin better. The stitches are still in his cheek.” Deciding to move close to Harry, he held onto his left hand and Harry watched as Morgan used a little bit of oil to help the tape slide off the skin.

Francisca entered the room and paused at the scene. “Are we taking it off now?”

“We want to see what’s underneath,” Morgan said, “whilst putting on some moisturiser. If anything, it will be dry and—do you have the antibiotic cream the hospital gave us?” Francisca nodded her head and retreated to get it for them. Once the last piece of tape was saturated, his cheek was on full-display. Without his glasses, he could only see the line of where the stitches ended and began. From a small slither near his nose to the harsh line in the middle of his cheek to where it stopped at the edge of his face, it looked gruesome regardless of glasses or not. Harry narrowed his eyebrows at the sight, Morgan’s eyes widening. “Oh dear.”

Tom moves to his right side and places a kiss above where the stitches were lined up, keeping his skin together. Morgan studied Tom with burning curiosity. He held his right wrist ever so softly, making sure not to touch the veins underneath the bandage there. “You haven’t changed,” Tom murmured to his forehead, wrapping his left around Harry. “You’re still as beautiful as ever.” He releases his right wrist and moves so he is holding his chin, gently. “And this was the price of your life; I’d much rather choose you now than the boy you were before for this reason.”

Harry knew what this was. Positive reinforcement.

But he wasn't going to argue, knowing that out of the two of them, when it came to being logistical; it was Tom. His words spoke with facts and were articulated to showcase what he wanted from Harry. For him to be okay. He felt tears wield in the forefront of his eyes, making his vision more blurry than it already was without his glasses. He leaned forward and Tom met him. Harry held his back as Tom leaned towards his chest, the two making out.

"Oh for fuck sake," Morgan groaned. "I'll be outside if you'll tell me when you're both done."

Harry parts and laughs shortly before he's back, latched onto Tom's lips.

He felt the happiest he had in a long time.

The rain wasn't letting up as the two of them cuddled in the king sized bed, Morgan had in her guest room. Tom kept stroking his face, his cheek gently - where the scar laid, and Harry felt relaxed by the notion. Realistically, Harry knew that the scar wasn't going to change anything in-between them. He had scars before he ended the arena that he showed Tom but this scared him. The entire memory of the arena frightened him. He struggled to go to sleep because of the memories that plagued him.

Despite this innate fear, driven into him that he wouldn't be loved; couldn't be loved, the only person who softened the burden to any degree was Tom. Tom knew him before he was anything special. Before he did anything incredible in the Districts. Before he was picked for the Hunger Games. Before he won the Hunger Games. He loved him back when he was a baby; a small six—to eleven year-old; loved him despite the distance; and cared for him during his time at the Capitol, the Games, and now.

He was right. Nothing had changed.

But Harry would agree, his heart belonged to Tom.

He would trust nobody with it as much as he would him.

After thinking, he concluded under the suspicion, Tom's heart belonged to him as much as Harry's did to the older teenager. And he

loved that about them.

Chapter End Notes

yay, happy ending
but nooo it doesn't end here yet :)

Until next Sunday, peps
Exam season is rough
Up next, "Slut!"

Also note next Sunday I will upload chapter 17/18, meaning I'm on hiatus until next month
Anyway, until next Sunday <33
Thanks for all the comments, kudos, subs, and hits people
I really appreciate them
Note: I've decided to rearrange some of the chapters/add mashups in!! :) so yeah, ignore the up-next titles for some of the ones I've rearranged
P S

"Slut!"

Chapter Summary

Posted: 25th of March, 2024

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Harry was woken up early.

Around nine o'clock in the morning, both of the sleeping teenagers had the overhead light turned on and Tom groaned, wrapping his arms around Harry. They both didn't have their shirts on due to the warmth of the heater in the room but it didn't stop Francisca from taking him from Tom. As if he was being taken away from Tom, he held out his good arm to him and said a dramatic "nooo—" but Tom watched him leave without trying to rescue him. "Sorry, Harry. I'm still asleep."

"Betrayal!" He shouted and Francisca laughed at their antics.

He sat on the chair they placed before him in the bathroom and Morgan applied the antibiotic cream to his stitches on his cheek before beginning to put another bandage on top of it. She taped the bandage and began to do his makeup as Francisca fluffed up his hair with more oil. She redid his braid and put an interwoven golden string into the braid, and at the end where she attached the hair-tie was a few small fake flowers she attached to his hair. Rhodes was fixed on his clothes and Bonavich did his nails a deep black. Due to the fact his interviews were later that day, he would return back to the Interview Building and have his makeup redone there but they wanted him camera ready.

After an hour of being on the chair, Tom slinked into the bathroom, gave Harry's head a quick kiss before heading out towards the kitchen. Turning his head to Harry by the door, he asked. "Do you want coffee or tea or anything?" Humming coffee, he returned with a warm mug, smiling as Tom sat down on the counter with his own mug.

"If you could smile like that everyday, you'd be paid millions." Bonavich comments. "Tom's on the sidelines, for sure."

Harry flushes at the comment but he doesn't turn away from Tom's

gaze.

He would never.

He wore a silk t-shirt that opened around his collar bones but kept his shoulders hidden. Gold was the theme as Harry wore a small headpiece of woven gold into his hair. The shirt continued until it got to his lower arm where the fabric finished. His bandages around his wrist were shown and protected underneath the glove they managed to make for him. It was light, useful, and tense to get used to but he knew, internally, it would help him do anything with his right hand from then on. It was grey with golden seams, the glove. There was a pair but unless he wanted to wear them both on cold days, he wouldn't have to.

The pants were white, shimmery like coconut water but thicker than the silk. It was to assist him with the blasted weather that was outside, causing a storm to everyone. He wore a single soft black slipper that connected to the base of Harry's heel but was easily able to slip on and off. As a result, he was allowed to wear a fuzzy woollen sock that made his feet tingle on the leg without his boot. The boot was taken off so he was able to wash it; and the other pair to the socks were put on atop of the bandages and the boot was placed back on.

Around his shoulders, he wore a woollen jumper that made his skin tingle as well. However, he was allowed to let it sit behind him if it didn't feel cold enough to wear it. Looking at himself in the mirror, he looked pure with the brown bandage that was plastered to his skin. His lips were glistening, coated with ruby-red lip gloss Morgan put into the little side bag that was attached to his wheelchair. An expensive one, she commented, which made him flush.

Harry had never needed expensive things but knowing how the Capitol acted, he accepted it for what it was. When Francisa pointed out Tom's neck and jaw area, everyone paused at the sight of all the hickeys Harry had left in his wake. Tom flushed at the bruised patterns and Harry flushed, bemused, and shrugged. "I know how to make hickeys; but I wasn't trying to when I was kissing him. Perhaps his skin is soft and knows it's mine."

Tom choked and Morgan stuttered at the claim.

Bonavich wolf-whistled, Rhode patting his left shoulder in congratulations, whilst Francisca wiped a rogue tear from her eye - beaming happily. The group began to get ready for Harry to depart

the apartment, but he ate a soft breakfast composed of fruits and carbohydrates first. The toast is warm and buttery with the inclusion of avocado; something Harry's never tried before. They cleaned him up before Morgan began to wheel him out of her apartment. She pointed at Tom who was in no state to leave the apartment. "We'll see you behind the stage of the Interview Building. You better be there, I need this one to smile happily before the Capitol."

They exchanged a kiss before Harry left.

The rain made Harry and the crew stay under shelter as he was greeted by the two victors, Esteven Graves and Viktor Krum. He felt nervous being with two of the strongest victors amongst the lot; with the exception of some of the younger victors, but he was the youngest. Pursing his lips, knowing who Esteven Graves also was to him — Silver's mother, she drove his wheelchair around. "This isn't permanent, is it?" She questioned him.

"No," he shakes his head, calmly as they roam the street slowly. "This will be, though."

He shows her, Victor, and the camera his glove. "Due to the extreme pressure, the veins in my wrist became compromised. The surgeons spent the most time healing my wrist and cheek," he pointed to the bandage, "but I'll forever need the glove. My shoulder and wrist, on my right side, will forever make it difficult to carry stuff on his side. I'll manage though," he concludes, "I'm quite known back at District 12 to be able to adapt."

The two victors gave him a harsh, loaded expression that he was able to investigate was full of sorrow, apologies, and mild surprise. The word he was looking for was pride: as if what he said described everything they've had to go through and deal with. Bearing it with open arms. The camera was being relayed back to the Districts and the Capitol, noticing himself on a few billboards and televisions screens. Viktor Krum began, "do you happen to be ambidextrous?"

"I suppose," he debated. "It depends on what I'm doing, but all the heavy work I previously did would be easy enough to manage with my left arm so long as my ankle heals."

They watched the rain pour down from the sky, the group looking out to the sky from underneath the building. The cameras were on him. Viktor Krum sighed, shaking his head, disappointed. "Usually the sky

is better; summer rain."

"It's alright. It means food will grow prosperously in the Districts."

The two victors observe him.

Harry can't stomach yet the fact he is now included within that statement. Esteven continues to roll him through the empty streets of the Capitol now the storm has come towards the Capitol in full-force. He tilted his head towards the women. "Silver…" he murmured, and she gently put a hand onto his shoulder, devastated. She musters up the strength to shy away from her tears.

"Don't you worry about my boy," she tells him. The camera was unable to pick up the noise due to the weather. "He is forever grateful to you as am I. And I meant what I said. No matter what happens, I'm on your side." Harry doesn't understand what she's referring to but bobs his head in acceptance. Although, he didn't want anything in return from her. "I wanted all my kids to be safe from the Hunger Games. And I know now, that was a pitiful wish. If I don't want them in the games," she whispers into his ear. "Real change has to happen."

Esteven pulls back. "Victor agrees."

"Yes," he hums, a small sad smile upon his perfectly symmetrical face. Like Tom's, he's reminded of. "I agree. The world would be happier; and it's not as if any more trauma would do anything to us." The three victors all head inside due to the demands of the cameraman, ignoring the fact they wanted to pick up the words and play it for all to see - but it was much rather a private conversation for another time.

Inside the chocolate store, Viktor Krum heads over to a section in the place. "These are my favourite types of chocolate," he tells him - handing Harry the opened pack. The clerk tells him he's not allowed to do that but Victor waves his hand and tells the clerk to put it on his account. Harry tries the chocolate and hums as the warm, sweet, buttery taste melts on his tongue. He murmurs, delighted. "This is delicious," he concludes.

"Yeah?" He laughs softly. "I'll get you as many as you want; but there are heaps to try."

The trio spend a good amount of time at the beginning of the afternoon, tasting various flavours of chocolate and ice-cream until they determine what exactly are their favourites. Viktor Krum buys both Esteven's and Harry's chocolates, despite both demanding that he

doesn't have to. Murmuring to the two of them after he puts the bags underneath the wheelchair in the hidden compartment, he tells them as the rain blows heavily outside. "It's the least I can do."

The rain begins to slow down as they walk around the luxurious streets of the central centre of the Capitol and a lot of young children come to greet them when their parents finally allow them to come outside. Harry is overwhelmed at first, but because he had two victors beside him - they were able to distract a lot of the kids for him. He was asked for signatures and autographs from a few with objects to sign alongside pens; Harry making up his signature on the spot. Even adults wanted to get autographs from him and the two victors beside him politely told the public surrounding them that he was still concussed and recovering, and that they'd need to give him a bit of space. They went through the rain puddles to the park where Harry was amazed at the architecture they had for the kids.

He sighed, murmuring. "I would've loved to grow up with this."

Esteven nods her head. "My kids would have too."

"I was more for the adventure of jobs, in my District." Victor told them, Harry asking what he wanted to be when he grew up. "Definitely, a Peacekeeper. However, now I'm a victor. I no longer have to work. Same with Esteven, even though she likes to work with Borgin and Burke with their design projects. Too bad they're sick," Victor shook his head. "What would've you liked to be?"

Harry takes a deep breath, thinking about the question. "I was a performer. Perhaps, I would've worked around the District in the coal mines once I was of age." He shrugs his shoulders, nonchalantly. "Now I don't have to."

"What hobbies do you have?" Esteven asked. "Y'know, your skill."

"As a victor?"

"Yes," Victor hissed.

Harry knew he had to be careful with his answer. "I liked to write songs, and perform them with the instruments we created from the trees. It wasn't much, but it was home." He moves the braid behind his ear. Esteven takes it into her hand as she observes the pattern. Victor watches her. "I like to create clothes with the thrown-out materials some of the Merchants gave us. Create foods from random seeds I could find. What hobbies would you suggest for me - since you

guys would be more knowledgeable with the prospect?"

"I can see you being a painter. Or a writer. Or a performer. Or a crafter." Esteven fiddles with the braid. "You should invest in hobbies and get supplies from the Capitol. A drawer. Photographer. Do scrapbooking. Or sewing. You could garden. I think you would like all those."

She releases the braid.

"Who did your braid?"

"My stylist." He admitted. "Francisca. She mimicked it from the one I did in the arena."

"Tell your stylist to come in contact with me," Esteven tells him. She gestures to the braid. "Your braid… I bet all the kids back at home will want me to do one on them. I'd like to know how to fiddle hair into the pattern she created with your hair." Harry accepts that and says if she wants to hang around and come backstage to the Interview Building, she'd be able to teach her. Harry, Esteven, and Victor all begin to head towards the direction of the building - Viktor Krum telling Harry all about the food they had in District 2.

The trio made it to the backstage entrance of the Interview Building. Esteven pushed him in. "I was quite impressed," admitted the victor. "I never expected a victor to win like you did. It was either you or the District 6 girl; and you were hardly breathing, but fighting for your life. We all commend you." She touches his dark curls softly. "Wow, these are soft."

"What do you mean by that?" He inquired.

"Lots of people were debating the softness of your hair. It was practically glowing beneath the chocolate shop's lights." She fiddled with his hair before continuing to push him. The woman had muscles and Harry turned his attention back onto the stairs they were about to come across. She pushed him into the elevator. Viktor Krum entered and the door shut behind them before the cameramen could catch up to them. Esteven and Victor's faces shuttered immediately. "Finally, a breather." Viktor grumbled.

Harry leaned his head back to the two of them. "They're going to make me have a skill - aren't they?"

"You're their new shiny toy, Harry," rolled Victor's eyes. "Of course."

“Thank you for what you did to my son.” Esteven placed a hand onto his shoulder. His eyes linger on her distraught face. “He was in pain and you put him out of it, I applaud and indebted to you.” She says, the age on Esteven’s face becoming more prominent. “I’m not sure if you’ve heard,” however she pauses, glancing around the elevator. “We should speak another time.” Victor and Esteven nod to each other and Harry accepts he’ll be left out of whatever they were planning on saying. The door clicks open and they head over to the private dressing room.

Inside, Francisca takes Harry from them immediately before he can tell Esteven that it was his stylists that did his hair. The two victors turned wide-eyed when they saw Tom, sitting on the couple. Tom, the stylists, and Harry all blinked at one another whilst the two victors came to their own conclusions about the matter. Victor asked, “is this room bugged?”

“Not to our knowledge,” Morgan tells him.

“You two are dating.”

Esteven looks between the two, studying them flabbergasted. “Oh my,” Victor sighs. “What are you doing here, Tom Riddle?” Questioned Esteven, glaring at Tom. Harry held a hand to his face, shrugging his shoulders before turning back to Esteven. He tells her, “he’s my childhood best friend - don’t ask, but yes. We’re dating.”

The two victors didn’t know what to say. “Are we the only ones to know?”

“In this room, everyone knows.” Tom answers.

Francisca eyes Tom, “what about Neuro?”

“Who’s Neuro?” Harry searched in his memory, not recognising the name.

“Don’t worry about it,” Tom tells him. “I’ll explain his importance later.”

His boyfriend snaps to Francisca. “Neuro doesn’t know about Harry and I. He only knows that we’re close. Andromeda is fucked in the head. Her boyfriend - who knows with him. And the rest, Francisca, are all fixed with Andromeda’s idea as well.” Francisca sighs, shrugging her shoulders as if she didn’t know how to comment. Harry was confused at what was going on. So were Victor and Esteven. Tom

turned his head back to the two victors. “Yes, the only ones who have confirmed about us are in this room.”

Victor holds both of his hands to his head. “I have so many questions right now.”

“Ask away,” Harry said.

Tom turned his head to him before Esteven gestured to his neck. “You guys have had fun.”

At the comment, both Tom and Harry went red - knowing what she meant. Harry’s face was like a fish as Tom hid behind his hands. Neither were used to these guys knowing about the two of them. Esteven bursted out laughing, which Harry eyed as Victor gently held her, as it turned into crying. She was mourning her oldest son; he could understand. He mourned his mother and father, even if they died seventeen years ago. It was a fresh wound. “I’m—I’m so happy for the two of you.” Victor murmured consoling words, the older women gently telling him it was okay. “Silver would’ve been happy to know that his life meant something.”

“Yes,” Victor sighed. “Susan and Valor would’ve liked that too.”

“I’m sorry about Valor,” Harry whispered.

District 2’s mentor shakes his head. “It’s alright. They died for a cause.”

Tom’s eyes snapped at the words that came out of his mouth.

Then, the door began to rattle. Harry swiped for him to hide and Esteven, Victor, and Francisca kept the door shut as Tom was able to hide in the costumes cupboard. Once they opened the door, Francisca apologised to the camera crew. She told them the door was locked and that they had to unlock it again. The two victors began to do their own thing, with masks up high, as Esteven stood over Harry watching Francisca rebraid his hair. “Wow,” she admits. “That’s lovely.”

“It fits the model,” Morgan tells the two.

“Yes,” Francisca smiles down at him - performing for the camera. “Pretty for his face, no?”

Esteven agrees. They continue to do his makeup and change his outfit which the cameramen step out for, and once he’s all ready and the

people outside are readying themselves in their seats; Harry asks the cameras for some alone time before he goes onto the stage. They depart and the two victors wish him luck but don't leave in time for Tom to return from the closet, pressing Harry a kiss which he melts into. Harry smirks, eyeing the two victors who are staring at the two of them in shock. "You'll do well out there," Tom tells him, "Barty isn't going to do anything stupid."

"Let's hope that's the case."

However, the grin on his face doesn't dim even as he's wheeled away with Morgan behind him, assisting him up the ledge of the stage. From where he's sitting, waiting for his cue to come onto the stage, he takes deep breaths and observes Barty who is dressed up in lime green. It was an obnoxious colour but he rolled himself on when he heard his name announced: "and now, for the time you've all been patiently waiting for—the boy who lived, Harry Potter!"

The cheers were astoundingly loud as he rolled himself onto the stage.

They got louder when they saw him.

Too distracted with the victors hanging around his dressing room, he didn't pay attention to what he had been put in. It was a lavender silk shirt, like the previous one he wore still with everything identical to what he previously wore. Except, this time, he had more makeup on. He smiled softly at Barty Crouch Junior who had a bothersome glint in his eyes but nonetheless had the same energy when he first met him. "Harry Potter," he began, "everyone has been waiting for you. You've bedazzled us all."

"Oh really?" Harry began, noting the microphone clipped to his shirt. "I didn't think you too me took much as a charmer, if I was going to be honest with you."

Barty gasped; as a result, the crowd gape at his blunt statement. He fiddled quietly with his lavender fingernails with golden leaf shimmers layered on them. The colour combination was a soft masculine in the Capitol, Rhodes told him. Like how sky blue and magenta matched. Lime green and bright pink matched. Blood red and sun yellow matched. The combination of lavender and gold was the same to the Capitol like silver and dark blue. They emphasise masculine beauty. As a result, lavender and gold was the chosen decision for the stylists. Additionally, his eyelids were dark with purple - the darkest tone matching his skin colour shade, whilst the

crevices of his eyes were lavender as if to replace highlighter. Golden liquid eyeliner departed from his eyelids like angel wings as he sat there, passively.

The announcer shook his head. “No—gosh no, Harry.” Barty gaped. “We were all infatuated with you before and during the arena. More so now than ever before; you’re a dazzling sight.” The adult was charmed. He flushed with nerves, but he took it at him being embarrassed at his comment. “No, really; everyone loved you. We were all very sympathetic with Silver and Alistar. With the passes of the District 10 tributes, Ladislao and Imelda. I spoke to the Twins you mentioned, yourself who were back at District 12, and I can say for certain Imelda would’ve loved them.” “Yeah?” He commented, almost shyly. “I think so too.”

Barty Crouch Junior fed into the nervous and vulnerable act he was feeding them. Harry didn’t feel like discussing what happened in the arena at all with them, but at least if he was going to be forced to - he would act as if it was a pain to talk about so the Capitol citizens had a harder time associating the Hunger Games with anything good. Still, he didn’t think it would change much. Then, Barty discussed the time when all three of them peed together on the first floor which surprisingly, Harry snorted at. A rough plastered smile dimming on his face as Barty showed Harry the recording of the moments leading up to the incident. Imelda groaned. “I don’t want to get up.”

Harry stared at her, leaning his head back against the mirrors. Ladislao spoke up. “Harry, we better want to move unless you want to get wet.” Then, Harry heard the sound of pissing and almost immediately stood up when Imelda began to piss where she sat - lazily not caring who saw. A smile broke out onto Harry’s face on the television screen, and inside of his chest - felt as if they both should be alive. Besides him. They were dead, Harry reminded himself.

Imelda smiled when he bursted out laughing.

Shrugging his shoulders, in that moment - deciding if she could do it, why couldn’t he? And began to piss in his underwear as well. Harry cringed but wasn’t going to ever take the moment back. In the arena, it was one of his happiest moments. Imelda slapped her thigh, laughing at the action. Ladislao only looked up dreadfully at Harry, before sighing. “Alright. I can’t be the only one not to, can I?”

Then, Ladislao pissed his pants with the rest of them.

Once they were all saturated and calm down from the laughing fit the whole situation caused them, they began to move on to some of the other things they did afterwards. The television screen turned off the scene - Barty turning the audience's attention back to the two of them. In the back of Harry's mind, he knew the audience found this hilarious but he found it no longer amusing.

"You, Imelda, and Ladislao gave us a compilation of extremely laughable moments." Barty pointed towards the crowd. "This Hunger Games was one of the funniest, and raw games in a long time." He gestured back to the screen. "Let's see what else we've collected."

Then, the screen showed Harry, Ladislao, and Imelda running after 7 and Pearl through the maze mirror like they were chasing a lost child - or something. The clip of the three of them on the ground and their reactions to 7, Susan, Laurent, Malia, and Pearl all fighting. The moment when Imelda and Harry first met and they're getting over their worries of what the arena features. Ladislao and Harry meet for the first time in the arena. Harry shouting Imelda's name after she abandoned him, along with Imelda's reaction. Sassy comments Harry kept saying, which he rolled his eyes at - asking how else should he say some of the things he said. Along with a lot of the other ridiculous comments he said as the prisoners are chasing and fighting him.

U9 said. "That wasn't supposed to happen."

"Neither was I," Harry glared at him. "But things happen for a reason."

The prisoners taunting him, saying the most stupid of comments, and Harry beating the shit out of them. The scene turned to where he was sitting on top of the box and chopping their limbs off the inside reactions of the prisoners. Harry flinched. However, the Capitol was eating it up. Every moment where he was able to kick and injure the prisoners, the audience laughed at them. Not him. They were rooting for him - which was extremely weird. Then, Barty spoke up as the screen's speaker softened. "And there were promiscuous moments."

It showed on the screen where Ladislao and Harry were speaking whilst Imelda was asleep on his lap. Ladislao was staring at him and raising his eyebrows suggestively. Fed up, Harry spat out. "Of my fucking—just spit it out."

"Do you like her?"

"Ladis," he shakes his head. "No—I have like five beaus at home. I'm

quite content, thank you."

"Make it six, then?"

Harry nearly choked on the screen with his mouth and eyes wide, staring at him as if he didn't just say that. "You're so shameless." He declared, "and you're not even drunk. I swear, I've heard some shameless things but that happens to be top of my list." Harry thought it was a beautiful moment when they were speaking like this - because it was; they were their own people. Now, they're dead and Harry will never speak to them again. On the screen, Harry's oblivious to the horrors that are to come. He smirks, tone signifying it was more of a joke. "Unfortunately," his eyes narrowed. "I'm more into lads, if you get what I mean?" Harry winks at him.

The younger teenager flushed at his comment.

Harry was pissed off at the Capitol for using these precious and sensitive moments like this against him. On the screen, Harry bursted out laughing. He wasn't laughing now. "My revenge arc," he teased. Then, Ladislao declared he would then put that at the top of his most shameless list and Harry was still being a little shit; saying he would be happy if he did. The whole situation got underneath his skin. Realistically, he wanted to skin himself alive but couldn't. It was a worry.

It cut to when Harry spoke about his main beau.

"She might see me as attractive but you definitely have her heart. Not that I'm offended," he winks at Ladislao - the teasing tone still in the back of his throat. "I've got my main beau after all." Ladislao commented how he was promiscuous in his interview and asked who it was. Harry gave a brief description of how the person felt so nothing physical about the attributes would come back to bite him in the ass. "A wonderful person who has my entire heart; I hope he lives on without me if I cease to exist."

"That's really sad," Ladislao frowned.

The teenager laughed without feeling humorous. "Ten of us are already dead, it's now our odds. One out of fourteen. They're not much better than what we originally had. Only one career is dead. Outlier one, Silver, is still alive. Outlier two, 7, is still alive. Outliers' three and four are still alive. Outlier five, Rex, is still alive. And I'll put in, outlier six; Malia, is still alive because the little girl frightens me to death."

“When you said outlier three and four, you meant us, didn’t you?”

“Of course; sleep with your enemy, not your friend.”

“Is that a saying?”

Harry shrugs his shoulders. Harry hated how he acted. It bugged him how they were monopolising them even in death. “I’ve found that in life, your enemies are usually the people who will like you the most - even if they hate you. Hate and love correlate, you know. My beau and I… well, one might say we should be enemies. And we are our greatest enemy and ally. I think it’s why we work so well together. I just hope that if I die, he won’t be too caught up on me is all.”

“Harry,” Ladislao shakes his head. “Anyone would be caught up on you.”

“Thanks, Ladis. I think the same can be said about you though.”

“Me?”

“Yes, I’d never forget you if you died.”

Ladislao fell silent. His voice was a whisper.

“Thank you, Harry.”

The screen changed and it was back onto the prisoners who kept speaking about Harry as if he was food. It was disturbing, and Harry knows once he’s alone back in District 12, he’s definitely going to have nightmares about them. Tom was keeping his nightmares at bay, the warmth of his arms and body keeping him safe; in mindless, dreamless sleeps. Once it turns cold in the winter, he’s going to be struggling. He feels it. Barty turns to him once the clips end. “There were a lot of moments you had in this year’s Hunger Games.” He told him, and the audience. “Some of the most inspirational were the passings you committed. Alistar’s, Silver’s, Valor’s. Some of the compassionate moments were when you took care of Imelda’s injuries before your own. Cried for the tributes that weren’t your responsibilities.”

The crowd began to go wild with comments. “We love you, Harry!” He heard. “All hail, the-Boy-who-Lived!” “Long live, District 12!” “I won my bets because of you!” Then, during all the chaos, he noticed a familiar group of people. Tom was wearing a navy blue shirt and silver. He smiled in the distance at the colour combination, knowing

that it must be Francisca and Rhodes' doing. He sat, watching him, and he felt his breath being taken away from him.

Barty's line of sight followed him, and Harry narrowed his eyebrows at his complex expression. It was as if he was jealous of him. Because of Tom. But it went beneath anger, it was fury. Tom glanced between the two of them and Harry knitted his eyebrows at the expression he presented. It looked unhappy at Barty; but rested when he turned to look at him. Barty also noticed the change and resolve when he looked at Harry.

Barty turned his gaze to him. "Harry," he began. "Beside the large number of moments between you and the rest of the tributes in the arena. I was wondering if we could discuss outside the arena for a mere moment."

"Oh?" He paused, feeling his heart race. "What do you mean?"

"I was only wondering about the lack of access we were to have, visiting you in your hospital room. Both awake and unconscious. Additionally, because we weren't able to discuss with you about your injuries, if you could tell us about the conclusion of the doctor's diagnosis." Deep breaths Harry, he closes his eyes as he thought. Harry opened his mouth to speak. "Due to the nature of this year's Hunger Games, with the prisoners, they had extra security in place to prevent any contact from the outside."

"Then, what about the President's successor then?" Barty brought him up. Harry was going to murder him.

"What about the President's successor?" He bidded, perplexed. "Oh, actually - that could be a reason for the high security; his life." Harry shrugged his shoulders as if he didn't know any better. Barty was beginning to look even more pissed at him. He cleared his throat, ignoring Tom's burning look from the audience which he could feel was directed at Barty. "Like I said, due to the nature of this year's Hunger Games—and with the President's successor turning eighteen this year. I've been told rumours - since none have ever been confirmed with me, that when the President was younger, he had some hand in the games and as a result. Wanted his own successor to do the same." He smiled at the audience. "Randomly, District 12 was chosen so take that however you like."

"Really?" Barty gaped, as if he didn't realise Harry would have a story to back up his demanding and disgusting question. Harry could tell it

was out of jealousy.

Again, shrugged his shoulders lightly, playing into the act. “I haven’t talked to the President myself but Tom’s promising as a successor, I think. What do you think, Barty?” He battered his eyelashes at him innocently, Barty pursing his lips calculatingly. He doesn’t give time for the announcer to answer. He turns back to the audience. “What do you think—the President made an excellent pick with who he chose as his successor, didn’t he?”

Tom rose his champagne glass in the air at him, the television screen turning onto him, and the audience erupted into noise. A lot of people began to spring onto Tom instantaneously and Harry flushed at all the cameras that began to shutter. It was as if they had waited years to get any juicy information on Tom and now, Harry gave them a bone to chew. Tom didn’t look displeased, however. He looked prideful. Harry hoped he didn’t stuff up his career for him - despite the extreme excitement the audience had for him.

Barty appeared embarrassed.

Internally, Harry laughed at him. He could imagine Tom joining him. They waited until the audience cooled down when Barty finally interrupted the loud amounts of chatter that was streaming through the rows of velvet. “Well, people. There you have it. The winner of the 74th Annual Hunger Games - Harry Potter!”

Without fail, the audience erupted into sound so much so his ears ached. He smiled brightly, eyeing Tom as he stared at him, and Harry rolled him off backstage. There, he was assisted by the backstage crew that wheeled him back to his dressing room. Once situated comfortably inside, noticing the snacks, treats, and gifts that were laid out for him - one of the crew members murmured. “All those are for you. Your stylists wanted you to enjoy them.”

Retreating, he was left alone in the room.

Harry didn’t touch any of the treats and actually slept on the long couch that was there. All of this acting was making his head hurt. Grabbing a soft blanket that was on the couch, he draped it over himself and began to sleep. It was late until he heard noise in his ear again. Tom entered the dressing room, Harry flipping himself over to his back as he watched his stylists enter in after him. Tom lifted his legs up and he sat down before resting his legs back on his lap. “Gosh, you really are a wonder.”

“What happened?” He asked. “Barty was an asshole.”

“Yeah, I know.”

Francisca passed Harry a small champagne glass that had red soda in it whilst she passed Tom an alcoholic one. She pursed her lips together with a giddy expression on her face, Morgan slumping down in the stylist chair beside her. “What an excellent night!” She declared. Harry sat up with the assistance of Tom, sitting close to him as he held the soda in his left hand. “You, darling, were an icon. Nobody is ever going to forget you.”

Tom pressed a soft kiss to his bandaged cheek. “Thank you, Harry.”

Harry still didn’t know what transpired after he left but Tom appeared content. He relaxed onto Tom’s side. Morgan began to relay what had happened. “So basically, we all know Tom is here because of you - but with that little lie he created about President Dumbledore telling him he was on a personal project as training for the position as his successor; you’ve cemented his lie and the Capitol now believes it as truth. And the President now cannot refuse this fact because too much of what you said, rumours of him mentoring and his involvement in the game in the past has been confirmed as true - and now everyone believes Tom is going to be president by the time he turns eighteen. Whether that is true or not, we’ll find out, but the President is in a sticky situation.”

“Really?” He turns to Tom. “That’s great—although, he’s not going to be out to kill me is he?”

“No,” Tom shook his head. “However, you might want to be careful with your friends… your beloved by the Capitol but they aren’t. I recommend that we continue this apparent partnership the Capitol has declared we have and then, anything that happens to you will have a reflection on me.” Harry agrees. He doesn’t want his friends and family to be targeted now that the Hunger Games has royally stuffed his life up.

Tom, no longer needs to hide from the media, however, with the details of their relationship so uncertain, needs to be careful so he leaves with Francisca back to the party the Capitol citizens were having whilst he left early due to needing to rest. Morgan drove the car back to her apartment but on their departure, found heaps of Capitol children and adults waving him a goodbye. He waves back to them and ends up on the big television screen before Morgan blacks

out both back windows to save himself the trouble.

She wheels him back to her apartment where the two find a random teenage boy inside of the apartment. Harry blinked at him, pursing his lips, questioningly as Morgan sighed at the younger teenager. “Neuro,” began Morgan. “What are you doing here?”

The younger teenager heard the noise from his headphones and took them off. Turning to the two of them, Neuro gasped at Harry but his attention immediately went back to Morgan. “Tom said that I could meet Harry after the Interviews.” His green eyes snapped onto him, a smile blossoming on his youthful face. “It’s lovely to meet you.”

“So you’re Neuro?” Harry tilted his head.

“Tom picked up a stray,” Morgan answered.

Harry paused at that comment but Neuro only said “I’m not a stray!” in an extremely childish manner. Because of the entire situation, he had his own soft smile. His gaze lingered on the boy with blond and blue hair. “It’s nice to meet you, Neuro.” He glanced down at his wheelchair. “Perhaps I should continue this conversation on the couch alongside you.” Morgan pushed him to the couch where Neuro nervously asked if he should help him, to which Harry said he was allowed to touch him. Neuro lifted him and Harry found himself situated on the couch nicely.

He crossed his legs, turning to the teenager. “How old are you?”

“Guess!” Neuro said with a friendly hiss, childish smile dancing on his cheeks.

“Mhm… well you know Tom so fourteen—fifteen, maybe?”

Neuro turned to Morgan who began to make something in the kitchen. She glanced up from what she was doing at the sound of his voice. “He knows his stuff! Andromeda wasn’t wrong.” At the comment, Harry tilted his head in thought. Neuro knew Andromeda. And Tom said before that ‘Andromeda was fucked in the head. He didn’t know about her boyfriend. But the rest of them, they were all fixated with Andromeda’s idea’ when speaking about if the people in his dressing room were the only ones that knew about them. Then, Neuro was brought up by Francisca.

Harry decided to coerce the teenager into telling him. “Andromeda, I’ve heard of her. But—what wasn’t she wrong about?”

“Oh,” Neuro rolled his eyes. “Of course, you wouldn’t know.”

“Don’t know what?”

“About you and Tom!”

At that, he began to laugh, slapping the couch with his left hand. “Oh that’s funny,” he shook his head as Neuro observed him curiously, unknowing what he was talking about. “Tom and I are dating if you don’t know. All I’m asking is what Andromeda is right about?”

Neuro pursed his lips, narrowing his eyes all of a sudden. That—was what Tom kept looking after the teenager for. He was exceptionally clever. Keeping his eyes thin, observing him likewise, Neuro appeared bothered by something. Harry wasn’t sure what it was with this teenager but if he wasn’t Tom’s age in school, nor apart of his group of friends, and a friend of Andromeda’s—who Tom has said in the past he doesn’t like; he must not be included with all the normal activities Tom has done whilst he’s been unconscious. Harry leans forward to Neuro’s ear who leans back slightly. “Who are you Neuro?” He asked gently. “Tom doesn’t just pick up strays for no reason.”

“What do you prefer, a Hunger Games or no Hunger Games?” Neuro snapped back at him.

Harry tilted his head two inches from Neuro’s face. “Did you seriously just ask me that?”

Gritting his teeth, he glared at him as he whispered. “What do you think?”

“Gosh,” Neuro zipped back. “I do not like you.”

Sighing, rolling his eyes at the teenager, Harry began both smug and bothered by the teenager’s presence. “Whatever you like about Tom, you’re not going to find it in me. We’re total opposites, if you haven’t realised that already.” Harry continues to study the teenager. “And if I’m going to be honest with you, I should be the one that’s more pissed. I’ve gone through the entire Hunger Games and won. I shouldn’t be expected to answer a lousy question like the one you just asked.” He points a finger at his chest. “I’ve been humiliated, dehumanised, mutilated, traumatised—all for the sake of the Hunger Games. What do you think?”

Harry stood up and began to hobble away from the teenager.

He didn’t want to be around him any longer.

Chapter End Notes

Sorry for the single chapter. I'm quite tired so I am unable to edit the other one at this specific moment. This week I'll upload the last chapter (of the 18) but until April the 14th I'm on hiatus. Then, I'll be back!
Until then folks,
Up next is "Glitch & You Are In Love"...
P S

Glitch & You Are In Love

Chapter Notes

Posted: 31st of March, 2024
1/3 of the way done after this chapter :))

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry pouted at Tom when he entered the bedroom at one o'clock in the morning.

Finding that Tom was exhausted, he took off his shirt and came onto the bed where he leaned his face onto Harry's chest. Harry began to stroke his shoulder blades as he asked. "You haven't been telling me everything, have you?" Tom pauses from underneath him. "Neuro. Morgan joked that he was a stray you picked up off the street but - he's young - and isn't at an orphanage. I have a lot of questions and I know you're tired, but I have to ask. What is Andromeda involved in —what is Neuro involved—and Tom—what are you involved in?"

Turning over, Tom looked up at Harry, grabbing his necklace that hung on his chest and began to fiddle with it. He was procrastinating and Harry pinched Tom's side. "Ow!" Tom glared up at him before his gaze softened intensity. He rolled his eyes before his brown met his green. "After seeing you in the games. I had a conversation with Andromeda which turned into this entire thing. As it turns out, the Capitol is quite frail and is creeping on the edge of a rebellion."

"A rebellion, Tom?" Harry shouted. "And you didn't think of telling me?"

"Look," Tom hissed, taking his left hand. He pressed a kiss against it. It didn't soothe any of the worries that Harry had. "After a lot of conversations, I'm now a part of the rebels inside of the Capitol. They're planning on stopping the Hunger Games for good; and finishing this reign the Capitol have had over Panem. Equality in all the Districts and Capitol." Harry was flabbergasted to hear all of this. "Neuro is a rebel. The youngest and almost as smart as me. He was living in poverty so I practically 'napped him and his mother so he would have a safer place to live."

"Harry," he began. "It was bad."

"What do you mean?—this is the Capitol."

“His mother is sick and has been in a coma for the past four years. He’s been on his own, homeless, in an abandoned building inside of the outermost parts of the Capitol. As a result, I took him and his mother to Francisca. I said that tonight I would explain everything but I didn’t expect him to come to Morgan’s.” He rested his head against Harry’s chin. “The record store has a rebel member inside of it; which was how I was able to get the copies of the Marauders. It’s this whole thing,” he tells him but Harry wants to know more.

“I’m leaving tomorrow—no,” he shakes his head. “I’m leaving later today, back home. I need to know everything, Tom.”

“Look, Harry.” He gulps. “Nothing much has been done yet. Between the time I see you when I hopefully am able to have a holiday at District 12, and between the Victory Tour; I don’t think much development is going to happen.” Tom admits, knitting his eyebrows, causing himself unnecessary wrinkles. Harry begins to stroke them to soften the tension. Tom melts. “I’ll let you know when development happens with the rebels, but tonight, Esteven, Victor, and a lot of other victors are beginning to join our cause.”

“You actually think?”

“District 13. They think and I think I know for sure that it’s real. We’ll have a fighting chance.”

Tears bloom in Harry’s eyes, “that’s what Esteven and Victor meant.”

“Yes,” Tom touched his chin with a single finger. “However, we’ve all agreed that out of everyone - you need to heal and that technically you weren’t to get involved with the plans. Before you decline and say no, you don’t want to do that. Listen to reason,” Harry pouts. “Everyone in the Panem is watching you after the Hunger Games and tonight’s excellent performance. You and I are now allowed to interact in the eyes of the Capitol, but we need to be careful. When you go home, do not speak of the rebellion unless in the forest. It’s the safest there, okay?”

“Victor’s Village is bugged?”

“Most certainly.” Tom pauses. “Have you heard of panopticon before?”

“Kind of—back when we were kids, maybe.”

“Yes, but it’s the theory and realistic truth in this scenario. It’s the

concept that all prisoners of an institution are to be observed by a single security guard, without the inmates knowing whether or not they are being watched." He gestures to the air as if it was District 12. "Nobody knows if they're safe, but the one place Dumbledore wouldn't bother touching because it wouldn't be worth his time would be the forest. Take your friends there if you want to say any incriminating things because you don't know when you're being watched." Tom sighs, Harry kissing his forehead. He flushes at the touch.

Harry begins, "thank you for telling me."

"It isn't an issue," Tom says. "I thought you should know before you go back. We want to be ahead of him if Dumbledore does catch onto the rebellion — okay?"

Harry hums, closing his eyes and he falls asleep.

———

Tom and Harry wake up late the next day.

Since the only obligations they have is the Closing Ceremony where Harry receives his crown from Dumbledore at noon, and the gala afterwards which Harry's only obliged to be at for two hours before he departs on the train. They wake up at ten, where Harry is then forced to sit in the makeup chair for a good hour and a half whilst Neuro grumbled to Tom about him - and Harry kept sticking out his tongue to the teenage boy who grew pissed at the sight. Tom smiled at the adversity before he was then forced into the makeup chair by Francisca and Rhodes who had to somehow coordinate their outfits subtly.

Harry ended up wearing another gold chain that was wrapped around his neck in a vine-pattern, that was also much shorter than the twin-necklace he was allowed to keep on. His curls were oiled and crunched to give off the innocent affect, whilst the single braid that was to the side of his face, had a feather attached to it instead of flowers. Harry noted the feather looked a lot like a Mockingjay's. His eye makeup was a cyan that had golden eyeliner again. Additionally, his eyelashes were curled and had a bit of mascara applied to them that was a midnight blue. Highlighter was applied to the corners of his eyes, and the bandage was a cyan colour.

His clothes were a deep rich blue, silk for the shirt again - because the Capitol thought it soothed wounds and made the skin smoother. And

he wore a black pair of pants. In the mirror, he looked like a god of kind. When Harry saw Tom's outfit, he was taken aback. Now, that was what a god looked like.

There weren't appropriate words to describe how ethereal Tom looked but once the Capitol saw him, they would be slobbering over his shoes to make them shiny, begging for him to be their President. Crisp, tidy, and magical were terms to describe him. And his ass looked good in his pants. Shut up! Harry said what he said. Regardless, Harry found himself enraptured by his look.

This was his boyfriend, he thought to himself. Oh fuck he hit the jackpot, didn't he?

Harry returned to their bedroom and found Tom had followed him.

Smirking at his god-like appearance, cheekbones of the Greeks, nose of the Romans, eyes of the English, body of the prehistoric-Panem athletes; no artist would be able to completely capture the perfection that was of his boy. They would be engrossed, and faithful to the words that would come out of Tom's manipulative mouth. Luckily, Harry had tricks up his sleeve too.

No clothes would be able to describe the essence that was Tom Riddle. The evil was addicting. The kindness was mouthwatering. The devious was grabbing. The love was smothering.
Unfortunately, Harry had his own sadist streak and pushed Tom against the cupboard, beginning to worship him. "I know why you followed me here," he mouthed into his skin. "Like me, you're captivated. You knew this would happen; but so did I."

"Harry," he groaned, knitting his eyebrows together.

"You don't even need makeup," he pressed his lips passionately. With rage and peace. With belonging to take the air he breathed in and made sense to replenish it kindly. "You one lucky, but angelic, bastard."

They're an awful mix of sadism and masochism, but they're enthralled.

Tom moans in Harry's mouth and despite being wounded, knows a lot more about sex than Tom so he begins to lower his hands down his back, making the older teenager shiver. Yes; shiver. Tell him all about how your body disobeys you.

Then, the door quakes open. “Oh for fuck sakes!”

Instantly, breaking apart. Harry leans his lips against Tom’s, leaning his bandaged cheek against his chin as they watch Morgan—then, Neuro—and then Francisca, along with the lot enter their bedroom. Tom burns in embarrassment but has been walked in on so many times before, with Than, and then Keziah and Arlia. He’s grown to know the best way to defuse this situation is to make the other person on the other end of the situation feel embarrassed. He wanted to squeeze Tom’s ass but decided he would later.

“Yes?” He quirked his eyebrow as if this wasn’t bothering him. “Hey,” he tilted his head at them. “You guys decided to walk in on us. There were context clues to suggest perhaps it wasn’t the right time. And, you could’ve knocked. What happened if we were on the bed and—“

“Harry!” Tom shouted in his ear.

Irking at the sound, he moves his right hand to his ear in pain. Immediately, Tom asks if he’s okay - both of them ignoring the group of people, staring at them bewildered. Morgan bangs her head against the door, screaming. “For fuck sake,” she points at the two of them. “We now have twenty minutes to get to the venue and be on stage in front of everyone. We’re going to be late now because of you two all because you found each other irresistible.”

“I’m sorry,” Harry sassed. “But if Dumbledore didn’t pick 12, none of this would’ve happened.”

Literally and figuratively. Everyone was sick of his shit.

Tom groaned at his behaviour; although, everyone but Francisca beamed at him.

Morgan told them to get into the car and Harry bemoaned, saying they were coming. Once all of them had departed, but the two of them. Harry squeezed Tom’s ass and began to kiss him again. Tom squeaked against his lips, surprised but then all they heard was, “now!” and Harry rolled his eyes, telling Tom he would have to carry him to his wheelchair.

Tom picked him up and they left with Harry in his wheelchair.

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Sitting before every citizen of the Capitol was nerve-racking, even

more so because he was on the television for all of Panem to see. He nibbled on his bottom lip. What made him even more apprehensive was President Dumbledore standing before him. Everyone was watching him interact with President Dumbledore. He sharply inhaled, standing up wobbly as Dumbledore retrieved a small golden crown from a silk pillow an Avox catered to him.

“Harry Potter,” he began, the teenager leaning forward so he had easier access to place the crown on his head. Once the weight was on his scalp, Harry met Dumbledore’s eyes. “Congratulations.”

“Thank you.”

Dumbledore ignored the curt and unapologetic appreciation. Instead, his eyes were on the feather that was attached to his hair. “What a lovely feather,” he commented - meeting his eyes. Harry stood up tall, not frightened by the daunting expression. Harry blinked, pausing, before opening his mouth and commending him. “Thank you,” he said. “It’s from my District.” Referring to the braid, instead of the feather. In spite of this, Harry noticed his ill at ease appearance at his comment.

“They must be very proud of you,” Dumbledore told him instead of the millions of things that rung through his head - like Dumbledore shooting him where he stood for everything he was about. Rebellion. Revolt. Dishonesty. Legacy. Revenge. Vengeance. With frightening blue—greyish eyes that bled with no colour of passion; he departed from his side. “Enjoy the party.”

Harry's skin itched and heart tensed at the missed chance for murder.

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He was brought down to the ground level of the auditorium.

The Capitol-citizens all shrieked and congratulated him when he appeared beside them, strolling through the crowd to find Tom and his stylists. Then, someone began to push the back of his wheelchair for him. Turning around, he found a woman with whitish-silver hair and she smiled down at him. “Harry Potter,” she began. “It’s lovely to meet you.” The woman felt familiar to Harry. “My name is Narcissa Black; I’ve heard Tom has been mentoring you.”

“Uh,” he paused. Not knowing how to reply. “Suppose.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll take you to where the party is really happening,” she

smirked and asked him if he could hold her drink for her. That technically she was grabbing one before he seemed as if he was struggling to find any of his companions. It wasn't long before he found what the Academy students (or what Narcissa told him) called the Pit. It had a fire in the centre of the pit, and chairs and couches were lounging around the exterior of the design. There, he found Tom.

Tom was wearing a deep red that hung around his body. Harry's eyes trailed up his body before he found himself smirking at the teenager before him. "Narcissa. Harry, you guys arrived." Tom went up to Narcissa and kissed her cheek before taking over her duty, pushing him around. "Francisca, Morgan, Rhodes, and Bonavich are over here."

"Aren't you going to take Harry to the Knights?" Narcissa questioned, perplexed.

Tom was swift. "Harry probably would be more comfortable with his stylists but," Harry and Tom's eyes met, "it would be beneficial if Harry was properly introduced. Although, he only has two hours with us before he's on the train back to 12."

"That should be plenty of time." Narcissa cooes. "Come."

The woman led the two over to the opposite side of the pit where Tom's friends were basking in the heat. Bellatrix, Narcissa's sister, jumped up when she saw him. "Tom! Narcissa!" She gaped, hurrying over to them. "Harry Potter; what a show you put on!" The woman shoved another one of their friends out of the way so she could sit next to him on the edge of the couch, seeing as Harry wouldn't be getting out of his wheelchair. "I'm quite the fan."

"Um," he paused. "I'm delighted?"

"Ah!" She gushed. "You're so adorable."

Harry flushed before Tom began. "Bella; as much as Harry would love to stay and chat, we have quite a few people to get through. Introductions are in order, after all." Bellatrix flattered her eyelashes at Tom, and purred, "of course, Tom. All I wanted to see was who you were so interested in and betted on." Bellatrix touched his bandaged cheek. "Who knew that you lied to us?" Harry stilled but Tom appeared calm above him. "Borgin and Burkes was a cover—wasn't it." She laughed, slapping her thigh with giddiness. "You really do surprise the masses, don't you, Mr. President?"

“Mhm,” Tom’s lips thinned. “Of course, Bella.”

Beginning to push Harry away from the woman, Harry met the man who Bellatrix pushed out of the way. Apparently, it was her fiancé. “Lestrange,” the man curted at him. “A pleasure, Harry.” The teenager nodded along with the man. “As are you,” said Harry diplomatically.

“You should meet Lucius,” Narcissa began. “He’s my fiancé.”

“Oh, that’s a lot of weddings.” Harry commented.

“Perhaps you’ll be able to come to one if we plan right.”

The two sisters smile, observing each other but Tom wasn’t in the mood to deal with whatever grief they bring to the others. He moved on and Harry met Lucius; who he thought was a very stereotypical aristocrat like Tom. Next, he met Evans - who was the teenager who caused Tom all the drama when he was first reaped and had a crush on him. He smirked at him, narrowing his eyes. Perhaps, Harry wasn’t jealous; he got the man at the end and he didn’t. But he didn’t want Evans to have his hands all over Tom once he was gone. The same with Nott.

They had the same eyes that spoke of destroying the other. A thin line made its way to Harry’s face. Glad that whatever features Tom didn’t like or see in Nott festered. Despite Tom having a crush or attraction to neither, they were both extremely attractive. Models would suit them both. Next, he was introduced to the Blacks parents; the Carrow Twins; Yaxley; Goyle; Crabbe; Gibbon; the Greengrasses; and a whole lot of high-class people of the Capitol.

It took two hours before the time was up, Tom glancing at his watch. “It’s time.”

“Alright,” Harry bobbed his head, nervous. “Let’s go.”

It took less than ten minutes for the two to find their stylists, and for the group to make their way to the train station where people were hurrying over to see him depart. Remus Lupin was already inside, as told by Morgan, Tom continued to push him there. Francisca told the Capitol-citizens to move out of the way as Harry was driven to the front of the masses. Tom was assisted by a peacekeeper to lift the wheelchair into the train - and he kept walking with Harry until he was fully positioned inside of the train, facing the crowd. Tom was in front of him, so his lips were hidden from view. “Harry,” he nervously began. “This isn’t the end for us, okay?”

Harry blinked back tears. “Francisca will look after me when the Victory Tour comes around, yes?”

“I’ll convince the President.” He pauses. “I will be back before then. Take care.”

Watching Tom depart from the train might’ve been one of the hardest things Harry’s ever had to experience besides the Hunger Games. Outside of the train, where he was completely sealed in, Francisca, Rhodes, Morgan, and Bonavich were waving profusely to him in their own signature ways. Little children were blowing him kisses, which he reciprocated. They laughed, Harry able to tell through their smiles—and nothing happened besides the joy the Capitol felt for him until the train began to move. They all looked panicked and distressed, as if they didn’t want him to go.

Tom appeared mournful but smiled through his sad expression.

All Harry was reminded of was their kiss from that morning.

He should’ve kissed him longer; held him longer.

He was going home.

———

Tom returned to the party with angst.

The after-party returned to the Mansion where only the richest and most powerful Capitol-citizens were allowed to come in. Tom hadn’t been there since Harry had first been reaped, but stuck in the hold of Bellatrix Black as she smoothly guided him into the Mansion. What’d been once his home—he felt incomplete. Like a piece of himself had broken away from him. Eroded; it pained him as if he was losing himself. He breathed in and out, trying to prevent himself from having a mass-panic at the anguish he felt at losing Harry.

Bella brought him alcohol, he drank.

This never had been home; it was back at that orphanage six years ago. With Harry.

The music was overwhelming, the smell of sex was overwhelming, the odor of sweat was appalling—his hands and palms were sweaty. He didn’t know how to breathe properly with Harry beside him. The sickly touches of women and men trying to pursue him was torturous;

reminding him of that blessed morning. The sticky air was acute. The conversations were repugnant. Everything made him feel everything. Tom thought he drank too much when things took a vile turn and began to vomit in the gardens.

All the colour was distasteful. All the cheeriness was heinous. Everything reminded him of what he had to live without. He sobbed. He only does that for Harry, he's found. Harrowingly aware that alcohol and weed was in his system, as well as the caffeine from the cigarettes he choked his hopes on—he kept spewing his contents out. Bella cheekily patted his back, asking if he wanted more alcohol as she giggled about the cuteness of his boy-toy as she called Harry. Tom wanted to crush her. But couldn't do the leap of his stomach that made him vomit more.

It wasn't even six o'clock.

He returned to the party after he stopped vomiting, finding himself in a room full of victors. Blinking, utterly drunk, and in no condition to speak to any of them—he pursed his lips. Cedric Diggory appeared distraught over something, not in his peak condition as he was early during the day. Esteven spoke up to Tom. "You look awful."

"Withdrawal," he began and Viktor Krum cracked up at the joke, which nobody else got.

But seamlessly did?—it was weird.

"All of us are in," Cedric began. "This needs to…"

He trailed off, Tom reminded of what he told Harry the previous night of the panopticon concept. Tom nodded his head in understanding but didn't say anything. He would be pissed if he was the President and had disobedient victors plotting in his own Mansion but Tom supposed he was no longer on the side of the President so fuck him.

Viktor stabilised him and brought him to Francisca—how? He didn't know, but at least he knew he was back with someone who would be able to take care of him. She gave him water and they departed at a random time, Tom passing out in the backseat of her car. He returned to her apartment and with her assistance, found himself in the familiar open space living room. Then, again—he passed out. He didn't even speak to Neuro; he was so out of it.

Harry found himself listening to the Marauders albums on the record player Tom got for him. All of his things gifted to him were alongside him as he watched the fields pass him by. Noticing Fleur, his escort, she stood behind him. “Congratulations are in order, Harry,” she smiled brightly at him. “How are you feeling?”

“Quite well, I suppose.” He told her, lying through his teeth. “I’m only anticipating the rain is all.”

“A wet summer.” She agreed. “You have a phone connected to your house at Victor’s Village. You’ll have my number with you, as well as your designers and stylists.” Fleur moved closer and gently put her hand onto his healing shoulder. “If you have any issues, come and talk to me; and I’ll see what I can do to fix them.”

“Okay…”

She took her hand off his shoulder and told him if he needed anything, she would be at the front of the train where her personal compartment was. Harry was left alone. Humming the tunes of the Marauders, Tom’s blanket wrapped around him comfortingly, he found the ride to be dreary. It rained heavily but not a speck of sound echoed within the building. Spinning his wheelchair, able to move with more strength due to the glove; he found himself in the bathroom.

Drawing himself a bath, he stood up from the wheelchair, took off his boot but kept his glove on, slipping into the bathtub, nude. The warm water drowned out his thoughts as he flicked through the channels they allowed him to watch. Weirdly enough, he found himself memorising by an odd television channel. It was popular and definitely what the Capitol citizens would like to watch with all the drama, but it was basically a concept of people getting together on the show. He found it puzzling to watch but it kept him entertained from his other, not-so gorgeous thoughts.

He changed, putting his boot back on and kept the braid in his hair.

All the makeup came off and he put on silk pyjamas on. They were a velvet colour, reminding him of Tom’s outfit earlier in the day. He blushed, eyeing his cheek in the mirror. Taking off his contacts, having more than he would ever need, he placed his glasses back on his face. They were picked by the stylists due to getting rid of the ones he had previously before he went into the games, he relaxed with them on.

He read a book in his bedroom about a fantasy of dragons, witches, and wizards, whilst also observing the furious rain and dark clouds in the distance as the sun began to set. Harry leant his head against his soft bed, holding the book above his head with his left arm. He put it down when he felt hungry. Entering the dining carriage, hobbling, Remus Lupin stared at him—haunted. The music of the Marauders played in the background, his shitty mentor gulping. “The Marauders?”

“You’ve been so drunk over the last few years, you forgot I was James and Lily’s kid, didn’t you?”

“Harry—I’m so sorry.”

“No,” he shook his head. “I don’t need an apology. You’ve watched kids die, year after year. You drinking yourself silly was the only way you were able to block the Hunger Games out of your head.” There wasn’t a bottle of alcohol in sight, but Harry knew before long, he was going to revert to his old ways. “James and Lily don’t exist anymore. But they began things,” Harry stood a seat at the table. “You, the Marauders, are going to finish things.”

“What’s the plan now?” Remus narrows his eyes at the luxurious food.

“I suggest that it’s not the smartest option speaking here.” Harry says outright. “However, I plan to begin painting and showing the other kids in the District how to make natural paints. I think it’s a clever idea. Additionally, if I take up sewing or knitting, I’ll be able to make clothes for the winter. Hobbies are a weird thing but I’m going to have to see how well I’m able to do them. Distract myself. Perhaps turn to drinking when things get horrid but,” he bites his bottom lip - unable to say anything worth substantial value. “Just enjoy life. Home…”

It was a funny thing, the concept of returning home after winning the Hunger Games.

Because the games don’t only change you as a person; they change what home becomes. He is no longer dirt poor. He’s loaded with money. He cannot physically starve anymore. He won’t ever see a difficult day again. But everyone else around him is the same. It’s not them who's changed. The Games are a cause and effect. You stay the same if you die, you change if you’re alive. Tears fill his eyes, nose blocked.

He gulped, the music playing behind him - dancing around in his ears. Would he ever be able to write another song again? Could he? He

understood Remus. The apology didn't matter to him because they were now cut from the same cloth, living in the same luxurious houses who didn't matter to anyone but the Capitol. They could live in poverty and be fine, but the Capitol wouldn't accept that. They think of gifting the victors houses as winnings. Gifting luxury as honour. It made him feel sick to his stomach. "Why is it - that us victors can go anywhere in the world now," perhaps not, "but when we return to the one place we called home - we can't?"

Remus touches his shoulder. "I know."

Harry sniffles, crumpling in on himself. "Would Sirius, Nathaniel, Abelene, and Sibyl be able to live with me?"

"Perhaps, the Peacekeepers might accept that as family."

"Can I give my winnings to other people?"

"Only through trading."

"Fuck," he cries. "This is my worst fear."

Remus doesn't say anything to comfort him.

Harry would think it would hurt more if he tried. Because no drunken addict would be able to feel better about the same situation they were in. His parents' friend, the one who used to be at the bar, defeatingly began. "Tomorrow morning, when we arrive at District 12 - there will be a celebration. Festivities. As you know, it only happens to Districts who have won during the particular year. You're going to be bombarded. I don't want that to happen. What do you want to do?"

He shrugs his shoulders, desperate for some normality.

"I want to go home."

Remus pauses for a moment. "I'm sure Sirius could make that happen. You would be allowed to stay there for the night, speak amongst them, celebrate at places." Remus sighs, unsure what to say. "You'll find that benefitting the District by raising morale will be the only thing that will feel like how home used to feel like."

Once Harry gained his sense of control back, they began to eat quietly. The two had nothing more to say to each other; and it was weird. Remus was depressed because he had no one who could relate to what he felt like. And for years, tributes have died under his care. But now

that he shows up, Remus has nothing to say to him. Next year, they'll take the role of mentoring both tributes who are chosen for the Hunger Games and… the cycle will continue. Harry looked at the meal on his plate. Unless the rebellion worked and the Districts won; or Tom became President - killed Dumbledore - and stopped the Hunger Games.

He'd much rather run away from the Capitol with Tom.

He hoped that maybe one day, they were both free from the duties they had to uphold.

———

Harry woke up the next morning, grim.

Dressing in soft cotton, in a plain basic t-shirt and pants, he settled in the dining room of the train. Remus was there, and so was Fleur. She appeared flabbergasted at his chosen clothing items, telling him to change, but he didn't want to. He stayed there, eating a small breakfast with some ice cream before the train came to a stop. "We're here," Fleur tells both the victors. Standing up, she points her periwinkle fan at Harry. "All your things will be shipped to your home. For now, all you have to do is get out of the train and smile - wave to all your friends, family, and community."

"Right now?"

"Ten minutes or so," she said. "Build suspense - know that the Capitol will be watching."

The only thing spectacular about his outfit was his necklace.

Harry sighed, looking at himself in the mirror of the train. He brought crutches with him instead of his wheelchair, slowly hobbling towards the exit of the train. Before he was put into the limelight, Remus said beside him. "Remember what your father told 12. Home is in the Districts; bleeding through every spirit. It's not how you change, or grow. It's about what you know. This tomb is the fate of the people. No matter the show."

"My mother wrote that though?" Harry snorted.

"Ugh, it's been a long time but it was something sappy James told everyone."

He went out of the train with a smile.

Chapter End Notes

my tumblr handle if you wanna keep up with me
https://www.tumblr.com/secretstrawberrysauce
I'm having a hiatus at the moment until April 14th
I'll can't wait to see you until then
(if you can't wait, I'll be posting snippets of the future chapters when I have time so... :))

Love you all!!
And I can't believe this fanfic has already gotten to 3,200 hits!!
Until the next time I see you
April 14th, "the last great american dynasty - Fortnight - Love Story - Florida!!!"

Note: I'm pretty useless at Tumblr so my updates (if I do at all) will be erratic

last great american dynasty & Fortnight - Love Story & Florida!!!

Chapter Summary

We're backkkkkkk

Chapter Notes

Posted: 14th of April, 2024

See the end of the chapter for more notes

ACT 2

Harry's shoulder made significant improvement.

The doctors told him that he wouldn't be able to lift it above his shoulder ever again, but with enough adjustment and soft exercises he put himself through, he was able to. All in all, despite the strain he felt when he did do it and the aching feeling that followed afterwards it was seen as a significant improvement. His wrist wasn't fixable, he found it frustrating. Sitting in the field outside of District 12, overlooking the forest—Hermione was reading beside him, Ginny was picking flowers with Abelene and Sibyl, Fred and George were collecting wood in the forest, Ron was finding different medicines to bring back to the Weasley's home, and Nathaniel was sitting besides him. The roaring sun was beginning to get colder as winter was around the corner. Autumn could only last so long. Nathaniel observed him. "How's the shoulder?"

"Better," he exhaled - continuing to stare out into the distance. "The doctors said it was better than what they previously expected."

Hermione glanced up from her book, smiling softly. "That's great, Harry."

Harry nodded his head, tilting it downward, glancing at the blades of grass underneath him. When he first returned to District 12, it took a week before he was able to get all of his friends into the forest without being caught. Then, he told them everything. It was hard at some parts but now, they knew; a rebellion was on the rise. They had to be ready for anything that was thrown at them. The sun warmed his skin

and Harry turned browner than he previously was. The braid was still attached to his hair and Harry allowed it to grow. His curls reached the back of his nape.

Everything felt different, despite not only winning two and a half months ago.

Home wasn't the same, and he was beginning to realise the extent of where his feelings laid. Returning with his friends underneath the fence, they headed back to the Weasley's household with all of their finds. Fred and George put the game they found onto the table; Hermione, Harry, and Ron began to look through the medical plants; Ginny, Abelene, and Sibyl sorted through the flowers they were going to replant outside of the Weasley's house, and Nathaniel assisted with anything else that needed help with. Harry spoke very little, feeling out of place.

Ron patted his shoulder. "We've got an excellent collection of mountain maple, bloodwort, calamus, maidenhair, and some of the other plants you and Hermione were studying." The three began to sort out the plants and which glass containers they were to go into. "For the winter, we should be able to take care of District 12 with all of these. We took care of a lot of the herbs that were to be picked during when you were in the Capitol, Harry; so there is no need to worry about it." Harry observed one of the glass jars.

"You guys collected a lot," he noted. "And these are hard to find, who found them?"

"Ginny. She found a whole patch of them."

Harry turned to Ginny and told her she had a good find. She laughed back and waved at him, saying it was nothing. They put the jars away, Molly making them food. Harry ate well, knowing he was able to assist them with food now because of his victor winnings. Although, most of the time they didn't accept what they had to offer him. Sirius, Nathaniel, Abelene, and Sibyl lived with him. He was able to convince the peacekeepers and the Capitol. He was happy they never had to starve again but always spoke of private conversations in the forest where Sirius took him since a young kid. Once finishing up his meal and washing his dish, he found himself lying on the couch with the younger Weasleys and the rest of his friends, napping. He did it a lot.

Head in Hermione's lap, resting with a blanket over the top of all of them, he found it easier to sleep like this. Struggling to sleep alone

due to the whole nightmare and night terrors he found himself stuck with when he was by himself.

He woke up after a while of sleeping, Hermione's hand in his hair, Nathaniel stroking his calf muscle soothingly, Abelene and Sibyl creating flower crowns with the remaining flower tops on top of the blanket - laying on him - with Ginny who sat on top of the couch— whilst the rest of them all conversed with each other. Hermione was the first to notice him awake. "How are you feeling?" He yawned in response. "Good," said Harry. "I feel much better."

"I'm not going to reprimand you on your lack of sleep," Hermione begins, Harry basking in the warmth her hand provided, "but it's worrying how deep your eyebags are becoming. Perhaps tomorrow I should come over and we try some of the sleeping herbs we collected?"

Immediately, he shook his head at the suggestion. "We're not going to waste those on me. If anyone, only in emergencies during the winter before we can collect more during the spring." Harry takes her hand, kissing it. "I promise, Hermione, I'm going to be fine."

"Alright, but if necessary you're sleeping in the field tomorrow."

"What?" He frowned. "I want to help."

"You already are, Harry, but it seems if I can't feed you any of the herbs - the sunlight will be a substitute for us being there." Hermione continues to read as she speaks to him. "It's not even a hectic day for us tomorrow. Neville is bringing Scarlet with him to the forest after noon, and we're all going to look for game we can preserve with other products we can ration for the district." Harry blinks lazily up at her, asking. "The peacekeepers are being extremely lenient with us - aren't they?"

"Despite all the rations we've got from your winnings, they are." She agreed. "I think it's due to the fact it doesn't make much of a difference with them whether or not they have more rations since it's all shite anyway but - Head Peacekeeper South, who took over Sirius, is a pleasant one." Hermione swirls patterns into his curls. "He allows us to exchange at the Hob and assists us occasionally with the distribution of game. A good man."

"I know him," he tells her. "Before he became the Head Peacekeeper he was with us Marauders a lot, wasn't he? The cute one."

“Yeah,” she agreed. Hermione flushes. “Smart too.”

Harry sits up and hands Hermione the cardigan he knitted from the large amounts of wool he was getting supplied from the Capitol. It was a dark blue and slowly, he was passing the clothes amongst his friends under the declaration that he had no need for it. “Yours,” he said. “You told me that you liked the colour.” Hermione takes the cardigan, kissing his non-scarred cheek, and says. “Thank you, Harry.”

“It’s not an issue.”

Needing to leave back to his house in Victor’s Village as it was becoming late; Nathaniel tapped Abelene and Sibyl, and the four all bid their goodbyes to the family before departing. Not accepting the cold as it seeped through his body, Nathaniel put his jacket, Harry was able to buy for him from the Capitol, over his shoulders. “As much as you love to give away your only source of warmth for others,” he whispered into his ear. “That wrist is only going to become worst with the cold.”

Harry shrugged his shoulders, the two girls looking their way. “It’s not as if it could get any worse. I’m hardly able to pick up a log of wood with my hand.”

“But you’re talented ambidextrous, Harry.” Abelene smiled at him. “Still, the hand should be kept warm, I’ll agree with. You should have a shower once we return.”

“I don’t like warm showers. It reminds me of the state of living that’s around us.”

“Accept that you won, Harry.” Nathaniel rolled his eyes, taking his wrist gently into his hand. “You lived. This is the price of living which you didn’t ask for - but you shouldn’t take for granted now that you have it. And it’s not like the Weasleys or anyone who asks is missing out; you basically rent your house out.”

“Is the old one still okay?” He asked, hobbling.

“Yes. It has all the weapons inside of it too.”

The four made it to Victor’s Village. The peacekeepers observed them and accepted their entry into the village, Harry glancing at the lights on in Remus’ home. He pauses before turning to the rest of the siblings. “I’m going to check out how Remus is and make sure he isn’t drinkin’ again.” They allowed him to head over without much

argument. Once he was inside, knocking to let Remus know it was him, the adult was slumped over a few pieces of paper - asleep, with a bottle of alcohol in his hands. Harry sighed in disbelief. “Remus, wake up.” He shook the man.

Sighing, unable to wake him up, he took the bottle and put the lid back on - placing it back in the cabinet with the rest of the bottles. Then, he picked him up and brought him up to his bedroom with a little struggle. Afterwards, he returned back downstairs and cleaned up the mess he created. Glancing at the sheets of paper that were there, he noticed what they said. ‘D2, D3, D4, D7, D10, D11 & D12 - all confirmed. TMR trip, 2nd of October. Victory Tour, 11th December. 3rd Quarter Quell Announcement, 14th May. Messages from D2 confirmed.’

Harry found this information perplexing, when was he going to tell him about this?

Glaring at the papers, he put them into the draw in his study and left, begrudgingly. Taking a bottle of liquor with him, he trudged over to his house. Clicking it open, he began to chug it before he got through the door. Nathaniel was cooking a second dinner, he could smell as he turned to head up the stairs. The girls were probably assisting with the preparations. Finding his phone, he texted Tom. ‘What do you mean, a trip to District 12 tomorrow?’

‘Remember, I told you I was going to come.’ Tom answered swiftly. ‘How did you find out?’

‘Snooping. Remus.’

‘Ah, I’ll be there in 2 days. Keep that a secret though.’

‘Really?’

‘Yes. I’ll see you soon, my love.’

Harry twisted the bath handle on, placing the bottle down as he stripped out of his clothes. Sinking into the burning warm water, he began to drink more as he thought about Tom and Harry; this new development. If he was going to come in the next two days, it meant that he was able to convince Dumbledore to allow him - which meant that he didn’t suspect them enough to do anything about it. His insides warmed. He was going to see Tom again! Even if he was with his preppy, snobbish, privileged friends. He drank.

Remus' alcohol bottles were a bad temptation for Harry. Drinking before the games was easy, the bar allowed him to have shots since he was young. Drinking after the games only became easier; nobody would stop him from buying alcohol with the exception of Sirius who wouldn't allow alcohol inside the household because he didn't want Harry to turn into the alcoholic Remus was. And Sirius was even trying to sober Remus up, but that was practically impossible. Harry didn't care, he wanted his brain to stop thinking for a moment in time. He drank more of the brandy.

Abelene found him with the bathroom door open. "Harry," she cooed, eyebrows knitted together.

"You know the rules, no drinking."

"Tell me that when you go through the Hunger Games," he tells her, pissed off.

She sighs before heading over to the side of the bath, kneeling down onto the marble. The sixteen year-old leaned her arms against the tub's rim, leaning close to him. Harry hasn't had the heart to call her Abele since the games. Or Nathaniel 'Than.' Or Sibyl 'Sib.' It felt off to his brain. Abelene watched him before taking off his glasses. "You haven't showered in two days; you're covered in dirt. Just relax." Harry was about to resist her washing his hair but she glared at him as if she wasn't going to accept no for an answer. Wet afterwards, she wrapped a towel around him. "Come on, we baked cookies and made something called curry. It smells delicious!"

Abelene left him alone in the bathroom and Harry stood there, feeling like a wet mole rat, wondering why he was alive. He reluctantly put on silk pyjamas and headed downstairs with his buttons on his shirt left open. Harry couldn't care enough to hide anything; he was exhausted. Finishing the bottle and leaving it upstairs, the fire was on, and his stomach ached—his meal intake was slow, still, after this distance of time between the games.

It's why he had two dinners a day; one at the Weasley's; one here.

Nathaniel flushed at his open chest, Harry slumping against the countertop island. His head was laid on the marble. Everything was marble for some reason. The two girls had nervous looks when looking at him. Sibyl touched his wet hair. "Wanna sit on the couch and watch a movie, Harry?" She asked him. "We can rest comfortably there."

“Where’s Sirius?”

“He’s out,” Abelene told him. “With the Marauders—I think?”

“You think?”

“He didn’t tell me about where he was going, or doing, exactly. All I know is that the Marauders were mentioned somewhere in that conversation. I don’t think he’ll be back until tomorrow or the day after.” Harry accepts the answer and is persuaded to sit on the couch. The three watch a movie on the couch whilst Nathaniel observes it from the kitchen. Harry falls asleep.

Served his second dinner, finishing up the movie with the sibling trio, and retreating back to his bedroom; he fell asleep with a knife in his hand. Waking up to another nightmare after an hour and a half of trying to sleep by himself, despite the warmth in the room due to the heaters, he tried again. Wake again in another thirty minutes, he breathed rapidly - unable to calm himself down as he grabbed his chest and scratched at it in pain. He sobbed, the tears like acid to his cheeks, crying so much. And he has to move - he has to.

All over the house, he moves, and Harry finds that he can’t stand still.

Heading back upstairs, he grabbed Tom’s hoodie, layered it with another cardigan he knitted - took off his shorts, put on underwear, pulled up hardware, durable pants to wear, mittens that were large enough to fit over his glove, and a scarf he made. He put on boots and left Victory’s Village. No peacekeepers standing guard, he headed around District 12 with no mission in mind.

His legs took him wherever they pleased and he ended up inside the Hob, to the back, where the bar was that held the durable planks that saved many through the winter. Marauders were playing, he listened, finding himself watching the teenagers putting on a show for the rest of the drinkers. He stopped to buy a bottle before leaving with it. No conversations were worth having when every time he felt like talking, he felt like he would choke and vomit over his own words. Bringing the brandy with him down the Merchants’ arena, he kept walking.

And walking, and walking.

Until he found the fence of District 12.

Slipping underneath it, he crept through the grass until he found the meadow he was bound to get sun poison from because he spent too

many hours out in the sun there. It was misty, freezing, and moist but it didn't deter him. Sitting down on the grass, he looked up to the sky, counting the stars. He kept drinking the bottle until it was halfway gone, lying on his back and staring up to the constellations he was taught about back when he was a kid.

He breathed in the scents of District 12; this calmed him.

Not warm bedrooms, not full stomachs, not clean bodies, not comforted couches - this struggle. The freezing air. The smoke from his warm breath. The stars that weren't covered by pollution. The grass that tickled his skin. The lack of expectations that awaited him here. It wrapped him in a blanket better than any silk or cotton the Capitol could find for him. He drank more when he felt as if he was about to pass out.

Harry didn't move when the sun rose, nor when the noise in the District rustled awake: he was alive and stupidly drunk, in the middle of a meadow where anyone could see him - without telling anyone where he was. He laid there, alive and exhausted. "Harry," the whispers began. "Are you there?" Not bothering to look up, closing his eyes before the confrontation hit him, a shadow hid his face from view.

"What are you doing here?" Hermione's voice rang out.

"Relaxing…" he trailed off.

Nathaniel smacked a hand to his forehead. "During the middle of the night no less," Hermione picking up the bottle, "drunk." Harry blinked slowly, glancing at the not finished bottle. He moves to grab it but Hermione tsked her head. Harry began anxiously, "I had night terrors again; and couldn't stop myself from moving… I'm sorry for worrying you."

The two softened their expressions. The rest of their friends were lingering at a distance away from them.

"Did everyone come?"

"We thought you went missing." Hermione justified.

"My legs, sorry."

No more were exchanged before they went on with the rest of their day. Harry stayed on the grass; in and out of consciousness; the

Weasleys, Crosephs, and Longbottoms siblings all went hunting and gathering - Hermione, his sole companion.

Their group headed over to the Marauders once nightfall began, the music lightening up the mood. Harry didn't sing, unable to with his deteriorating condition, but Scarlet and Neville did. Buying another bottle of vodka, he hid with the glass near the exit of the bar with two school companions: Adhara and Manon. Adhara had her own drink, clicking the glass to Harry's. Manon was watching the performance in awe. She was seventeen and almost a year away from being out of the bowl. The girl understood him well. "They're telling you not to drink, huh?"

He groaned, nodding his head at her. "Yikes," she smoked, passing the bottle to Manon. He was sixteen-turning-seventeen in November. "It's good that you have us to vanish you from the world. It's also lucky you don't have any classes anymore now that you're a victor. Life of luxury."

"A curse," he grumbled. "Winter's coming."

"Oh - we know." Adhara put the cigarette to her lips. "Everyone knows. You've been giving everyone cardigans, sweaters, mittens, scarves. Stocking up on the blankets and pillows here." Harry rolled his eyes at her antics, knowing she was less-drunk than him. Manon choked on the alcohol. That boy never really did have a tolerance for it, even before he went into the arena. "Birdies tell me that you've been stocking up on medicines, firewood, game. I think we're going to be okay this year, Picker."

"I don't feel like it's enough." He pouted around his bottle.

"Gosh, what more could we need?—we even have more free rations this year. We'll be okay, picks." She put her arm around his shoulders. He leaned into the warm, Manon handing the bottle back to Adhara. Manon gulped, tapping on Harry's nearest thigh. He groaned the last of the remnants of alcohol down, "definitely fine, Picker."

"What drama is happening at the moment?" Harry felt like he had to ask.

"You," she pointed to his chest. "You're mental health. It's gettin' worse, picks."

“I know—I know,” he lowered his head further into his knees. “I can’t stop thinking ‘bout the games, though.” Adhara lost her sister to the 71st Hunger Games. Manon lost his older sister to the 73rd Hunger Games. There were a few others that Harry knew that had more brothers and sisters lost, but they were the only ones in the bar that night - hiding in the corner he knew they would be in. Likewise, if he was going to speak to anyone about the struggles he was having, it was going to be the ones - who were willing - that had to endure the deaths of their siblings. Adhara and Manon took him in as if he was one of their own. It was an odd arrangement but it did better than what Hermione, Nathaniel, Sirius, and the rest of them were trying to do for him.

Afterwards, when the rain began, he headed with them back to Adhara’s rundown home. Inside her older brother returned from the mines, whilst their mother cooked for them. Manon hung out with them, outside, the group all snuggling up underneath the blankets Harry made for the family. Over the past two months and a half, he made a record number despite his wrist. Like a hundred. Some big for ten, some small for babies; he wasn’t the only one who made them, though.

He taught Abelene, Sibyl, Nathaniel - who all helped. Hermione, who became quite obsessed with making scarves. Some of the primary school children from the Merchants arena - Ore, Rik, Strata, and Terra. And occasionally, some of the adults in the mines. Roster was one.

Adhara smoked as the rain began. “Such bad weather.”

Manon and Harry relaxed, the second oldest chugging more of the liquor. By the time the bottle was empty, Harry was entirely buzzed. He fell asleep, woke up again, and passed out again. Adhara took them inside where Ness, her brother, welcomed him. He coughed out a hello, chest aching. Manon waved to him - and the group found themselves all bundled on the ratty couch. Ness leaned atop of the couch, “picker. Aren’t you supposed to leave for curfew soon?”

“What are the pieces going to do to me, anyway?” Harry grumbled. “Kill me? They already tried.”

“How drunk is he, Adhara?”

“Entirely.”

Ness grabbed Harry by the chest and pulled him up from the couch

where he placed him back on the ground where he almost toppled over. The older brother stabilised him before sighing. He took the bottle out of his hands, placing it onto the table behind him before picking him up. “Hey!” He shouted at him. “I—“ Ness shushed him. Harry leant up against his back as the twenty-one year-old held his legs in place. He told the room. “Picker needs to be back by eleven. It’s fifteen minutes to and we’re twenty minutes away.”

“Oops,” Adhera coughs. “Sorry.”

Ravine pointed at her. “Put the cigarette away, Addie.”

“Okay…”

Harry watched as Ness told his mother that he was going to return their victor, the adult racing back through the rain towards Victor’s Village. Nobody noticed the two of them in the dark, making their way onto concrete where Ness had less of a chance of breaking one of his ankles, and headed over through the Hob, to the other side where it was quicker to the Village. He slept on the way, the twenty-one year-old’s back warm, as he slowed down - getting closer to the Village. Once he got there, the peacekeepers took one look at him. “Okay,” she began. “You’re authorised to drop him off. Return within minutes.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

Ness walked through the Village and went up to the path of his house. Noticing the familiar door, he revolted - toppling from his back and vomiting in the grass. “Ugh,” Ness yanked his bangs from his face as his stomach contents were emptied onto the front lawn. “Up we get, Picks.” Harry was bridal carried to the door, Ness checking his temperature. “You’re warm.” Unable to say anything coherent, he observed as the door was opened, Abelene gaping at the scene.

“Ness?” She pursed her lips. “What happened to him?”

“Got into the alcohol again, ‘Lene.”

“Damn this boy—needs a lease on him. Thank you, Ness.”

“No problem, girl. All for our victor.”

Ness brought Harry inside, Abelene unable to Harry him by herself without assistance due to his wounds. He brought him upstairs to his bathroom where Abelene unchanged him. Ness stood at the door. “I’ll

make sure Addie doesn't bring him back home - and if she does, I'll bring him back here. Liesa wouldn't want to see either of them conversing." Abelene thanked him again before he left. The girl flushed at Harry.

He rose his eyebrows, perplexed at the situation. Abelene didn't like Harry like that so why was that expression on her face for? Glancing back to where Ness was just standing, he opened his mouth. "Him?" Abelene glared at him.

"Shut up, Harry. There's no need for that amount of sass to come out of your mouth."

"So'wy, but him?"

"He's hot." She begins, washing his hair and mouth again. "Ness might be a few years older than me but out of everyone in this stupid district, he's certainly one of the hottest. Coal mine can dust him anyday if I get to see him sweaty." Harry choked at the comment. Ladislao, Harry wished he was there to see this and would finally understand why he was like the way he was. 'Cause of this thirsty girl, and some of the other boys—girls he hangs around. They're breathing for others' sex for fuckin' sake.

Abelene sighed. "A few years, I'll start my master plan of getting closer to him."

"You're six'een. He's like 'wenty-one."

"Relax, Hazs." She scrubbed his sculp. "In a few years when I'm nineteen, he'll be twenty-four. That will be legal then, not as if there are real rules implemented to stop us." Harry eyes the girl who was closest to what a younger sister would be to him. Unimpressed. She glares at him and snaps, "everyone was worried about you disappearing again, Harry. As much as I like Ness on our doorstep, he cannot be here all the time. He has other priorities like his own family. You've got to begin taking responsibility for how you take care of yourself."

"So'wy…"

"Bed, I'm sleeping with you tonight so you don't run off."

"Alrighto."

———

Harry sneaks out early the next morning with a note to Abelene to alert her that nothing was wrong, he slept better than he had in a while, and he had breakfast before going out. Bringing a flimsy basket with him so he could hide it better, he went out to the forest this time. Not chilling out in the meadow exhausted and drunk. He wore his climbing boots, woollen vest, hardware pants, worker's t-shirt; and began to wood for the fire. He brought an axe out with him.

Chopping the trees he found out far in the forest, he spent his early morning gathering wood. It took longer than he hoped because he was using his left arm more than his right unlike what he would've normally done. The basket was beginning to become fuller when he noticed the river far-out from the forest. Deciding he was going to drink some water, he found himself putting the basket on the veranda of the house. Taking off his boots, he let his legs sit in the water as he grabbed a cup and drank the fresh substance.

Afterwards, he decided to take a swim randomly - all his clothes off, he soaked in the freezing water. His velcro glove attached to his wrist made it warmer so he didn't freeze the veins there completely. Returning to the house, he went inside and cleaned himself up with a towel before putting his clothes back on. Heading back with the wood attached to his left shoulder, hanging at his right side as he hobbled and gilded through the woods with ease; he returned to the meadow where Hermione was.

Immediately upon seeing him, she freaked. "Harry, what are you doing here?"

"What do you mean? I was collecting wood."

"We need to get back under the fence before they turn it back on."

Harry froze at the comment, "what do you mean?"

Then, it clicked. Tom.

Hurrying back underneath the fence with Hermione, they pit-stopped at the Weasleys, dropping off the wood before they hurried over to where the train-station was. She touched his curls, "why are they soaking wet?" He rolled his eyes, "I took a dip, 'Mione. Needed a freshener."

She gave him an 'are you serious' expression but Harry couldn't care. He was enlightened with the idea that he was going to see Tom again. Hermione knew that Tom was his boyfriend like the Weasleys and the

Crosephs knew. However, she was still completely enthralled with the idea of him dressing him up this - his normal District 12 self for him compared to the Capitol ideas. Once at the train-station, Molly kissed his forehead. “Oh, Harry,” she began. “Some Capitol-citizens are here for a holiday. I thought you were missing.”

“Don’t worry about me, Mrs. Weasley.” He told her. “I was only chopping wood.”

“And wet?” Fred sniggered. George touched his curl, “for a mornin’ swim were you, Harry?”

“Sweating.” He retorted back.

Neither twin said anything else to his comment besides laughing. He moved forward to the front of the crowd where he watched as the train entered the station. The peacekeepers protected the visitors on the train from coming in contact with the commoners but Harry was allowed forward. Stepping up onto the platforms, he waited until the train came to a stop. Then, a door opened and the world was introduced to the beauty that was known as Narcissa.

She gave Harry a blessed smile, “Harry!”

The women rushed forward and gave him a large hug. He ignored the way everyone else of the District stared at the introduction. To his knowledge, this wasn’t being broadcasted. She gestured to the inside of the train, “come. We have a lot to talk about.” Turning her gaze back to the rest of the people who were watching them, she gave them a smile. “I apologise, we were going to introduce ourselves to you all but we have a lot to catch up on with Harry. I hope you understand.”

“Take him forever,” George spoke up. Fred added, “long live our victor.”

“Ignore them,” Harry muttered. “They’re the Twins.”

Narcissa gasped in recognition. “I know you two.”

The twins pause, blinking, before Narcissa says. “We watched you two in the Capitol for Harry’s top eight interview.” A smile blossomed onto her face. Cheeks blessed with perfect dimples and smile lines. “I shall talk with you both later.” Taking Harry’s arm, he ignores the looks he gets from the peacekeepers. Inside the train, the door shuts behind them immediately. Then, Narcissa gave him a big hug. “Harry, how have you been?”

“Uhh,” he knits his eyebrows. “Coping…?”

“Ah, that’s good. Tom’s in the room over. I thought you might want to see him,” she winks.

Pressing a kiss to Narcissa’s cheek, he winks back at her - feeling awful from the hangover but refreshed from the swim. “Thank you, dear.” Hurrying quickly to the carriage over, there are no windows on the hobble over there - he is grateful Narcissa somehow knows of them. Opening the door to the next carriage over, there sat Tom.

Wearing a posh silk shirt and deep navy blue trousers, Tom wore a bluish black suit that hung from his shoulders lazily. Despite this, he looked as handsome as the day he left him. Tom’s brown eyes snapped to him, and Harry grinned at him. Softening, Harry practically jumps into his lap and the two begin to kiss. They don’t need to share words to know they missed each other desperately. Breaking apart from Tom, he held his face with both his cheeks.

Tom eyed his palms with suspicion but didn’t comment. Their foreheads were pressed together, their faces breathing the same air - they were struggling to inhale. “I fuckin’ missed you.”

His boyfriend sparked tears at the corners of his eyes, Harry pressing back to his mouth, opening and deepening the kiss. Despite his history with sexual scandals, he hasn’t let anyone touch him like that since he left the Capitol. Tom was his as much as Harry was Tom’s. Tom moaned in his mouth, breathing harder—when they both needed air. Breaking apart for air, Harry began to kiss his cheek, jaw, and pressed downwards. He needed to consume him entirely before he broke.

“Harry,” he groaned, leaning back. “Fuck, did you gain an accent whilst I was gone?—fuck.”

Tom shuttered underneath him, Harry looking up at him from his eyelashes. “Perhaps, alcohol and idiots do that to you,” he mouths. “And we are in the country, no one is gonna have a perfect, romantic accent like the rich of the Capitol.”

“Ugh,” Tom knitted his eyebrows tight. “What happened to Harry?”

“Nothing all that good, to be honest with ya.”

Tom grabbed Harry by the neck and swivelled him around so he was beginning to kiss his neck. “Hidden, Tom.” He groaned, “underneath the shirt. You may have hickeys. I cannot—you haven’t been seen and

surely one of these fuckin' whores—“ Tom bit deep into his skin accidentally at the comment. “Oh fuck,” he practically squealed in pain. He inhaled deeply, “oh fuck.”

His boyfriend broke apart from his collarbone.

Blood was dripping from his teeth as if he was a vampire. Harry laughed at the sight, both turned on and horrified at what happened. Tom’s cheeks were flushed, pupils extremely dilated, as blood began to drip down his shirt. It began to stain the white. Pushing Tom back, he began to leech and lick all his blood from the inside of Tom’s mouth. They were both a mess by the time Narcissa opened the carriage door again. “Oh my goodness—“ she shrieked.

“Shut the door behind you, dear.” Harry cooed. “Don’t wanna let anyone else in.”

Neither had sex but both were blessed out at the feeling of being around each other for the first time in ages. Narcissa stomped over to them, staring down at the mess they caused. Her pink lips were quivering. “Harry,” she began. “You’re bleeding.”

“Yeah,” he shrugged. “Got a bandage or something?”

“Uh, yes.”

She heads over to the first aid kit whilst the two lovers bask in their temperatures. She returned, noticing the mess that was on Tom’s shirt. “You can’t go out like that, Tom.” His boyfriend hums, agreeing with the notion but doesn't want to pull apart from Harry. He took off his shirt to show Narcissa the bleed. She gapes when she realises it was a bite mark. “Oh you two are feral. Tom!”

Tom narrowed his eyebrows at her. “We haven’t fucked, Narcissa. Nothing we’ve done is inappropriate.”

“How long have you known about the two of us?” Harry has to ask.

“I’ve had theories since the beginning of the games.”

“Ah,” he nods, Narcissa stating, “confirmed just now.”

“How wonderful.”

———

Cleaned up, Harry’s bleed bandaged and Tom’s shirt changed, he

meets up with the rest of the guests on the train: Lucius, Bella, and Lestrange. No Evans or Nott came along this trip, he was pleased about. Everyone else had fiancé's. No one would steal his Tom. Exiting the train after everyone else, he hung behind them, trying to appear natural. Unfortunately, he appeared to be happy when Fred nudged him. "What's got you so elated, huh?" Both the twins snickered, knowing exactly that Harry and Tom were an item.

"Mhm?" Harry puts a finger to his chin, thinking. "I don't know."

Ron pulls him away, thankfully, before he can cause more of a mess. The five visitors of the Capitol get a tour of the District from the Mayor. Hermione, Ron, Harry, Ginny, Abelene, Sibyl, and Nathaniel find themselves around a small fire as they observe from a distance the Capitol citizens walking through the District. Harry didn't feel like a bottle of alcohol as he sat there, smiling. Ron rolled his eyes at his antics. "Oh, you're done for."

Ginny nudged Ron. "He's done for?—what about us?"

"Hey," Abelene tapped Harry's shoulder. "No more alcohol."

He gave her an exasperated look. "I won't drink now that Tom's here."

"Addiction," Sibyl shakes her head. "It's not good for you."

Hermione sighs, turning her attention away from her book. She takes all of them in before sighing, again, as if she was all of their mothers. Ron glared at her, narrowing his eyes. "We aren't something that needed to be sighed at Hermione, all we're saying it's ridiculous how one man can change this one so much." He points at Harry as if he doesn't notice them talking about him, literally in front of him.

Luckily enough, he's in a good mood not to chat back to them. Ginny gasps, "oh no. It's worse than we thought. The President's successor has gotten rid of Harry's sass!"

"Oh no, back on the train he needs to go." Ron tells the group.

"Ah—hell no!" Harry glares at him. "Don't even suggest that in my presence."

"Hey," Abelene shrugs. "As long as this one doesn't drink—I'm happy for Tom to stay."

Tom and his friends were shown around District 12. From a distance,

Harry followed the group with his friends. Fred and George were sitting on top of the bar, Harry climbing up from the ground with some assistance from Ron and Ginny due to his wrist. Fred grabbed Harry by his waist and pulled him towards them. “Thank you,” he murmured, turning so he was facing Tom.

George and Fred told him that it wasn’t an issue and they were glad to see him sober. Ron, Ginny, Hermione, Abelene, Nathaniel, and Sibyl all climbed up onto the roof after him. Turning to the second floor of the building, Harry began to climb up it. Once sitting higher in the air, he watched the peacekeepers walk around the District. They weren’t about to yell at them for causing treason, the teenagers allowed to climb anywhere except outside the District. He wondered if he would be allowed to, despite this, now because he was a victor.

Footsteps behind him snapped his head to see Charlie walking towards him. Harry held his chest, exhaling. “What are you doing out of the mines?” Questioned Harry, Charlie sitting down beside him.

“Today’s my day off, I thought I should see who your boyfriend is.” The man explained with a content smile. Harry turned his head back to his boyfriend in the distance, Charlie nudging him. “What are you doing up so high?—your wrist still isn’t completely healed yet,” taking his hand and observing it. “This feels wet still.”

Harry shrugs his shoulders. “Don’t worry about it. I’m only chilling.”

“Do you think they’ll stay in Victor’s Village?”

“They’d do that?” Harry turns his head to Charlie, curiously.

Charlie gives one sharp nod. His lips were in a thin line. “For their own, of course they would.” He nudges Harry. “You perhaps should meet them in the Village — seeing as your this year’s victor.” Charlie winks at Harry and helps him down the building, Fred retrieving him from his brother’s arms. He landed on the ground, heading over towards the edge. George glanced up to the second floor to see Charlie, he asked. “What are you doing here?”

“Uh, don’t think about it too much.”

Nathaniel jumped down from the roof of the bar and helped Harry down. Heading over towards the Village with Nathaniel, Abelene, and Sibyl—the group all begins to disburse. Hermione nudged him, “perhaps we should all meet tonight at the Marauders?” Harry agreed with the plan, but he was told no-drinking was allowed for him which

he grew pissed at but accepted since he would be around Tom. The ache of the bite mellowed his anger, knowing he was so close to home.

They all, but Harry, headed inside of their house in the village, whilst he sat outside on the porch. It took a few minutes for Tom and his friends to begin to head over with the mayor to the Village, but when they did, it was all worth the wait. Tom's eyes were focused on him, ignoring the mayor as he sat there, eyeing him back. The mayor paused in front of the house. "Oh, Harry."

"Hello, Mayor." He greeted in-return. "How are our guests?"

"Well, thank you." Tom answered for the mayor, who snapped his head to him. Harry smiled content. "Perhaps you'd like to show us around the inside of our house—since you have one for yourself." Standing up, Harry plays into the act as if he doesn't know the Capitol-citizens all that well. He shrugs his shoulders, answering. "Why not?"

Stepping from the front porch, he began to hobble with his boot over to the pathway before directing them forward to the house that would be beside his own. The mayor appeared confused by the arrangement but Narcissa patted him on the shoulder, "we shall request your presence when we have more questions, Mr. Ganta. Thank you for being our tour-guide this afternoon, but I think after a hectic train ride, we would like to settle down for the night."

"Yes," Tom turned to him. "You've been all the help we could've asked for."

Bellatrix kisses his cheek and winks at the mayor, the group all separating from him. Harry sniggers, Tom's eyes less than kind in the direction of the mayor. Gesturing his hand to the door in-which they'll be staying at, Tom unlocks the door with a key he received when they first got into the Village. Once inside, Bellatrix sighed. "Gosh, he was an ugly man."

Harry laughed, "I wish I caught it on camera."

"You really should've," Narcissa cooes with a smile on her face. "I would've liked a copy."

The two sisters began to bicker whilst Lucius and Lestrange put all their luggage into the house. Lucius cleared his throat. "So, Harry—as you said before, you knew these houses better than anyone. Shall you

please show us around?”

“‘Suppose I can,” he began to show them around on the ground floor. “There are two floors. There is a big living room on the first floor with a kitchen attached to it. There is also a study and bedroom on the first floor.” Harry walked up the stairs, Bellatrix helping him keep stable. “Upstairs,” he exhaled once he was on normal ground, “there are four bedrooms. Two bathrooms. There is also a grand bathroom downstairs.”

“The only bathroom that is connected to a bedroom is technically the Victor’s bedroom - which is supposed to be the best bedroom in the house. Back in my house, I have that room whilst the rest of my family have the spare bedrooms.” He gestured his hand to the different rooms in the place. “You may choose what rooms you’d like.”

Lestrange became smug, “Bella and I have the Victor’s room.”

“No way,” Narcissa glared. “Lucius and I have the room.”

Tom and Harry were staring at each other fondly, ignoring basically all the bickering. The two sisters went to find the bedroom with their fiancé’s following after them, so once the two of them were alone - Tom and Harry began to kiss again. Harry wrapped both his arms around Tom’s neck as he went on his toes to kiss him. They parted, Tom murmuring. “Suppose I won’t need to worry about what bed I’ll get since I’ll be in yours?”

Harry only hummed happily at the suggestion. Tom whispered. “I think a Victor’s bedroom is only good when the victor is there.”

A flush appeared on both their faces.

Harry was delighted Tom was back in his arms.

Chapter End Notes

trauma responses?
We're so back bitches!
I hoped you'd enjoyed this chapter & thank you for waiting, I've been busy this past month so - hiatus. On Sundays, chapters might be a little late & that's cause I now play soccer so it might clash & I might forget but yk, we've got to make due with what we've got
I was honestly debating the title of the chapter but this works

I think it fits the scene veryyy well

Thank you to all the comments, and the support
Love you guys
Up Next, "Maroon"

damn, maybe imma have to rename some chapters considering the tortured poets department comes out on the 19th, either way...
Imma just see what the vibes are first before I do anything
See you on Wednesday!

P S

Maroon & Superstar & Red

Chapter Summary

sex. you're warned.

Chapter Notes

Posted: 17th of April, 2024
Ready for ttpd?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tom placed his things in the downstairs bedroom, hanging out with Harry on the couch. Narcissa, Bellatrix, Lucius, and Lestrange were still going at it upstairs about who got the best room so it gave Tom and Harry time to makeout. Underneath the blanket Tom brough to District 12, Harry had his legs in Tom's lap. Harry began, "I think you should bring your friends with us to the Marauders - everyone is going to be there with the addition of Capitol-citizens so I think it would be a good idea to mingle them with the District."

A small hand touched his scarred cheek. "Your cheek looks much better."

"Yeah," he sighed. "It's still scarred quite badly though."

"Yes—but the redness had reduced."

Harry smiled at him; not really caring about what came out of his mouth. Moving closer to him, he was on Tom, whispering into his ears. "Perhaps tomorrow morning, the two of us should go to the lake and have some fun there. It'll be one of the only comfortable places to have some fun if you get what I mean." Tom's eyes were on Harry's lips and he watched his eyes dilate. Tom leaned closer to his mouth, murmuring. "I'd be extremely happy to go with you."

They practically jumped apart from each other when they heard the stairs begin to rattle at the sound of the others and Narcissa hurried over to the couch with a knowing expression, she didn't say anything about the two of them, despite this—telling Harry to move down the couch next to Tom so she could sit on the other side of him. Harry internally laughed when he was half-sitting on Tom's lap as the others joined them. Narcissa turned to Harry, Tom placing his arm around him and to Narcissa so it looked as if he was making himself

comfortable. “What should we do in District 12 first? I heard that you were the person to ask about this type of thing.”

He shrugs his shoulders, nonchalantly. “It depends, do you want to do anything tonight or relax?”

“I was thinking of meeting some of your folk,” Lucius told him.

“Oh,” he put a finger to his chin. “Then, perhaps I know a place.”

Glancing towards the window, a thunderstorm was underway and going to hit them by the time they left the Marauders, he thought to himself. “You better change out of those clothes then. Into something a bit more appropriate, don’t want the storm to hit you and you're stuck in the mud in those high heels,” he told the two girls. “Wear boots and warm jumpers—nothing you wouldn’t mind seeing wrecked at the end of the day.”

Bellatrix pursed her lips, “I don’t think I have anything I can do without.”

Harry shrugged his shoulders. “Perhaps you girls might want to see what my sisters have?”

“Yes,” Narcissa smiled. “Abelene and Sibyl, correct?”

Harry nodded his head, “yes—those ones.”

Standing up from where he was sitting, he went to the back door and opened it with the group following behind him. He crept down the stairs and headed over to where his back door was. Harry hoped it wasn’t obvious that he was showing Tom indirectly how to get inside of his house without being caught. Once inside, Abelene, Sibyl, and Nathaniel turned their heads from the couch watching a movie. “Harry,” Sibyl smiled at him before it dimmed at the sight of their guests.

Gesturing at the Capitol-citizens, he began. “I was going to take these guys to the Marauders tonight but with the incoming storm I was wondering if you had any clothes you would be able to leant to the girls—and,” he turned to the men, “if Nathaniel might have something for the boys.” His pseudo-siblings all paused to observe them. “What are your plans for tonight?”

“I was thinking about staying in,” Abelene said. “With the storm but I suppose I could come out.”

“Wow,” Bellatrix murmured. “You guys have such wonderful accents.”

Nathaniel turned to Harry, from staring at Tom. He mouthed ‘he’s hot,’ and Harry smirked at him, nodding. Abelene stood up, after observing them and Harry long enough, sighing. “Alright, you must be Bellatrix and Narcissa. Come with me and Sibyl. We’ll show you around and try to find something that fits you. Than might want to see if he has something for them, but it’s probably unlikely due to the significant height difference.”

They all headed upstairs with the exception of Tom and Harry; they made themselves comfortable on the couch, Harry whispering. “You’ve already got clothes you can ruin here. You shipped a whole suitcase with your name here beforehand.”

“Of course,” Tom whispers. “I wasn’t about to be lacking necessities.”

“I’ll show you my room, then.”

Harry took Tom’s hand and was carried up the stairs, Tom apparently unable to see him struggle with the boot any longer with assisting — the two of them inside of Harry’s bedroom. From underneath his bed, Tom retrieved his old clothes and began to strip in front of him. Harry watched the view, shutting the curtain. Tom only had his pants on but Harry lifted his arms above his shoulders, leaning forward to kiss him. He murmured into his lips. “I’ve always wanted to tell you this, but you’ve got such a nice ass.”

Tom laughed and it hallowed Harry’s body, reshaping it with the infatuation he felt for this man. They kissed and they seemed to be doing it a lot, not that Harry was complaining. Having to break apart, Tom put the rest of his clothes on - with a jacket that reminded him of the one he wore in the arena, making him flush. Harry doesn’t think he’s ever seen him with something like it on before. It made Tom look hotter, if he was going to be honest with himself.
Returning with everyone changed and ready to head off, even the three siblings who didn’t look as if they wanted to go out in the pouring rain - they headed off towards the Marauders. The peacekeepers allowed them through and the teenagers all trudged through the bad weather, it growing dark. Once there was hardly any light, Harry held Tom’s hand. They broke apart when they entered the bar, seeing the Marauders playing.

Tom’s eyes widened at the environment. “This is it?”

“Yes,” Harry agreed. “These are the Marauders.”

Nathaniel's friends cheered his name and waved him over to them, leaving Harry with Tom and his friends. Abelene and Sibyl took their leave the minute the opportunity was granted to them. Harry showed them to the bar where he told them they could order drinks from. Narcissa asked what drinks were known for 12 and he shrugged his shoulders, telling them that it was either pure alcohol or a mixture of the easiest fruit it was to find; berries. Narcissa asked if she could get a berry mixture and Harry ordered all the drinks. Soot, the bartender, smirked up at Harry. "Got a lot of visitors today, mhm, picker?"

"Suppose so," she made the drinks for them, Harry passing the beer and bottles to the group. "Take what you'd like to try. It won't be anything overly sweet or pleasant, I'll alert you. The expensive sweet stuff is usually only reserved for visitors, realistically, but if you want what everyone else gets - this is usually it."

Tom begins to taste the beer, wincing. "This tastes disgusting, Harry."

He grins at him. "I know."

Once Narcissa got her drink, he brought them to a table where they'd be able to watch the performances. Neville and Scarlet were performing since their father was playing. Then, he heard his name being called out - turning to find Hermione rushing over to them with some of the others behind his back. Ginny must've left with Luna to find Cole and Vidi, but Ron, Fred, and George were walking in behind her. "Hello," she greeted - holding a hand out to Tom. "My name's Hermione Granger. It's nice to meet the man who looked after our Harry whilst he was in the arena." Tom shook her hand.

"It's lovely to meet you, Hermione." Tom's eyes glanced at Harry, recognising her name before smiling back at her. He turned to his friends. "Beside me is Narcissa Black, her older sister, Bellatrix Black. And their two fiancé's, Lucius Malfoy, and Mathis Lestrange."

"It's a pleasure to meet you," Narcissa smiles at her.

"I see you've got the Berry Deluxe," Hermione comments. "Harry created the drink."

The Capitol members turn to him with surprised expressions. "Perhaps, not created. I'm quite sure there are blends of fruit-drinks all over the Capitol," he justified, "but since there weren't any pleasant ones in 12 - I happened to be quite the berry picker and gifted them to the bartender so there was range. Blackberries, blueberries, a few strawberries if we can find any." He smiled

awkwardly but took the beer Tom left on the table - not willing to touch, and drank some of the contents before passing it to Hermione.

“Veine’s?” She questioned. “I suppose it isn’t the worst.”

Fred and George stepped forward. “It’s lovely to meet you guests,” Fred began. “My name’s George,” and George continued, “and my name is Fred. I heard we would be able to chat with you earlier and —“ “wondered if this would be the best time?” Fred finished. The Twins gave the Capitol-citizens a difficult but pleasurable time which was perfect; Ron joined the group with Exolian, the mayor’s daughter. She wanted to introduce herself to the President’s successor.

Tom drank more of the beer bought, and then tried out the Berry Deluxe which Narcissa let him. She didn’t let Lucius try any and told him to go buy some himself if he really wanted any, which prompted Exolian to ask. “You and Narcissa…” she wiggled her eyebrows at Tom, Harry glaring sharply at her—lips thinning. Hermione coughed at the accusation, Ron snorting. Tom appeared pissed and Narcissa ignored the drama at the table.

“Definitely not,” Tom told Exolian.

Hermione nudges Exolian. “This is the President’s successor. You’d allow him your drink even if he didn’t ask,” she contemplated, “it’s the same with the Capitol-citizens.” The mayor’s daughter flushed before shrugging her shoulders, apologising but that he’s never been seen with anyone before so she only thought he was keeping it a secret. Hermione bit her lip, Ron turned his gaze away from the table, Harry’s expression didn’t change, and Tom was smirking.

He shrugged his shoulders, bemused. “I suppose I would if I was in a relationship.”

“Exolian!” Called Ginny from a few tables over, “come join us! We’re placing bets.”

The mayor’s daughter opened her mouth, nodding, and telling the group how it was important that she joined them. Tom took Harry’s wrist underneath the table, stroking the scars on his veins as he glared at her. Tom whispered into his ear. “Very subtle, Harry.” Turning back to Tom, he sighed, deflating in on himself.

“She wanted you and suggested—“

“I know, but realistically speaking, I have you so why would I ever

want to follow through with some statements a District 12 mayor's daughter has to say?" Harry eyed him; he was on dangerous waters there. Tom got closer to his ear. "When can I have the victor from the 74th Annual Hunger Games?"

"Sap," Harry crossed his arms, accusingly.

The singing stopped from the Longbottoms and Tom nudged his shoulder gently, "why don't you go up and sing?" Harry watched as the performers took a break, Neville joining the table with Ginny, Luna, Exolian, Cole, and Vidi. Scarlet went to her friends. He shrugged his shoulders, Hermione speaking up from across the table. "Harry hasn't sung since he was reaped. Nobody expects him to know, but nobody is complaining either; they literally can't."

Tom smirks at Hermione - Harry noticing a companionship forming between the two, Ron takes a swig of the beer. "Harry's a fantastic singer like his dad. Have you heard him, Tom?"

"No," he shakes his head. "Perhaps you could," he gestures to the stage.

"Oh Tom."

Harry shakes his head in angst, frowning.

Harry knew why he hadn't sung in ages. It was partially because of the damage done to his throat and the fear that he wouldn't be able to sing again like his father, even if they had different types of voices. Sighing, glaring harshly at Tom. He pointed accusations at both his best mates as if they were to be the blame for all of this instead. Standing up, he took the beer and finished it all, placing it on Ginny's table as he went up to the stage. Breathe for fuck sakes.

Taking deep breaths, he stepped up to the stage. "Harry?"

Turning, he noticed Neville staring at him with bright eyes, Ginny shrieking and laughing with excitement, Luna staring at him with her loopy grin that Harry always appreciated with her kindness, Exolian's shock, Cole's surprised laughter, and Vidi's proud smile. He nodded at them awkwardly, guessing he was going to do this. Heading backstage where the instruments were with the performers, the noise in the bar became louder as he headed in the back. "He's singing!" He heard being shouted, unsurprised if it was from Fred or George, or Ginny—really.

Frank found him. “Singing again, Harry?”

“Yeah, I was persuaded…”

“What song do you want to perform?”

“I was thinking All for the Game.”

Marlene shot up when she saw him. “Harry, oh my gosh, you’re singing.”

Frank smirked, “and playing the guitar.”

Marlene gaped, gesturing to his hand: “do you think you’ll be able to play?”

Harry nods his head. “I’ve always been able to play the guitar better left-handed anyway. Unfortunately, I won’t be able to play the drums anymore with the strength and conditioning that goes into it.” She kisses his forehead comfortingly. Marlene speaks up, “where’s Alice?”

“Out gettin’ a drink.”

“Go get her!”

Mary walked up behind them with a surprised but knowing expression on her face, pride and acceptance. “It’s good to have you back, little picker.” She ruffled his hair ever so gently, glancing at the braid. “You reckon your throat is going to manage the high notes in the song?” Mary played both the guitar and the bass, which she was going to accompany him with. Marlene played the dulcimer, Frank played the piano, Alice usually sang Ballads but did a lot of things.

Getting prepared, Marlene passed him a hair-tie, he put his rogue hair into a ponytail as he let the braid hang loose. Washing his face to numb the nerves, he grabbed the guitar and attached it to his right shoulder that had padding to assist with the comfort. Harry wouldn’t have to be worried about shredding his wrist with his right hand now he was playing oppositely. Marlene got prepared like the others, but realistically—they’ve played the song so many times they knew it off by heart. It was only his injuries that were going to stop him.

Harry spoke up to the group who got prepared for the song. “I reckon we’re going to have to play a slower version of the song, if I’m able to manage in the beginning we’ll speed it up. Does that sound like a good idea?”

“All fine with me, picks.”

“Clear.”

“Very sound.”

Alice returned and squealed in excitement as she half-hugged Harry. “This is all so exciting,” Harry relayed her the information he previously told the rest of them and she was content with the idea. “Fair enough, we don’t know if you’ll be up to playing it so quickly like usual but we can always practice afterwards to test the theory if you don’t feel up to it. But of course, we’re very adaptable I’ll have you know. Picks.”

Picker or Picks was a nickname for Harry in the District. There were many reasons why people called him that, but these were some of the few reasons: because he played guitar with a pick - because he picked flowers, berries, took care of the community - because he picked both good and bad choices - because of his father; picking his mother, and Harry following suite with his father’s romantic legacy - and more.

It didn’t change now that he won the Hunger Games.

Holding his guitar, he went onto the stage and the audience went wild. Harry ignored the storm that was happening outside as the rest of the performers got ready to play All for the Game. Clearing his throat and standing before the microphone, he glanced around for Tom but he wasn’t sitting where he was. “Hello folks,” he softly smiled. “I haven’t actually sung a song in a while and it’s partially because I got my throat a bit damaged in the arena; so whether I can sing or not is going to be found out but tonight, no matter the answer, we’re performing All for the Game.”

Harry heard the screams and wild clapping of the Twins who he smiled at. Then, he glanced down and basically at the front row was Tom with Narcissa, Bellatrix, Lucius, Mathis. Hermione was there beside Tom with Ron; and the rest of his friends. “Let’s see how this goes, shall we?”

The lights in the room deepen whilst the ones on the blinding stage stay the same.

Marlene began the song with the dulcimer. Both Mary and Harry come in at the same time on their strings, Frank using the deeper side of the piano lightly, and Alice using her vocals to emphasise the feel of the song. Then, once the twenty second mark hit, he began.

No dazzling travel such as the Games
No fastening parade such as the Games
No capsulating castle inn such as the Games
No ravelling tassel such as the Games
All for the Game
All for the fame
All for your name, and legacy
Against all the jealousy
All for the remnants of your memory

Harry began to take his guitar with Mary MacDonald and dance around on the stage. His mother never had been a dancer, nor had his father, but Sirius told him that out of everyone - his dancing abilities only came from his grandmother, Euphemia back in District 2. He smiled, glad that he was able to keep up the previous speed the song was sung at. His boots made noise on the stage that echoed the pattern of the melody. He leant back into the microphone.

Think of the enemies
Drink for your felonies
Keepin' this battle goin' for centuries
All for the memories of the previous legacies
My ol' ma, Lily
For the ol' pa, James
The battle of cities
All for the Game

A heard a wolf-whistle from the crowd and he smirked, winking at the direction it came in. He began to speed up the song with his guitar, Mary nudging his side with laughter. He grinned at her. Marlene quickened the beat and they were on track to the climax of the song. Alice echoed his words with her stunning abilities.

Am I guilty?
Am I filthy?
Oh tell me please, how you want me all silky
(Oh, silky)
Oh demand me please into being pretty
(Oh, pretty)
Am I the willing?
Or am I the killin'
Cut me, chop me, plate me like a bunches of Lillies
Tell me 'bout how I'm living
Tell me about the fittin's
Tell me all 'bout the killings and sinnings

All about how I'm winning
Oh, how I'm the one winning
All of the battles, all of the shackles
Watch it as it all unravels

Oh m' father, James
In the veins, watchin' the aims
In m' old house frames
Keepin' the family gains
Does any of that die when I meet my days?
Does any of that vanish when I rephase my my names?
Oh, my father
How willin' are you to hear about those days
Oh, my mother
What about those bypassed chains
Would one day, will you'll be here to hear about
All of the Games?
Us children, with dainty like brains
Stoled for grains, and tesserae
All for the Games?

(Oh for the Games)
(Oh, the pains)
(Oh in the good ol' names)
(Oh, the shame)

Singing the last stanza, Harry slowed down the dancing:

All for the Games
Where breached history remains
All for the Games
Where the bleak victory sustains

Harry smiles at the crowd before dancing along to the music. Luckily, he didn't have to worry about the chords of the guitar too much as Mary did most of the playing on the bass. The rhythm of the song was easy to dance to, swinging around like it was his stage. He matched Mary's stomping pattern and copied it. The crowd were stomping and clapping along to the pace. Alice sang backing vocals before they got to the finale of the song. He smiled before stopping his dancing when the song ended. Moving up to the microphone, "seems as if I've still got my voice, people. Thank you for a wonderful evening."

Someone throws Harry a bottle telling him he earned it and he cracked the top for all of them to hear it crisply open. He drinks it as

he heads off the side of the stage. The cheers and claps are contagious as a grin blossoms onto his face. He ignores the way his scar dips into his dimple. Backstage, Marlene jumped up and down—pressing a sloppy kiss to his forehead. “Oh, Harry. That was great like always. I’m glad you were able to perform again.”

“It’s gotta do with that pretty boy out the front, doesn’t it?” Mary has a quirky smile, longing.

“What about Tom?”

“You didn’t stop lookin’ at him.”

Harry flushed, not realising that happened. The amount of times Harry spun whilst playing with the chords muddled him up. Frank clapped his good shoulder, cheering that they all should go out and grab a drink before Marlene stopped him, “no way. We’ve got to let the kid live a little like his father. We’ll have drinks with ‘im later. Our picks has a got a beau waiting for him in the crowd.” Nerving eating away at him, he mumbled. “He asked me to sing.”

Mary squealed, clapping her hands together excitedly. “Ah, so adorable young love!”

Alice rolled her eyes. “What is this ‘bout now?”

“Our victor and the President’s successor,” Marlene replied, smug.

“Oh hush; I’ll begin talkin’ about Rein if you’re not careful, Marlene.” Harry pointed an accusatory finger at her, drinking the beer and walking back out the side of the building. Out there, he found himself covered in the rain as he used the side entrance to get back into the bar. Once inside, the cheers got louder as people began to speak to him—it was weird, the amount of chatter that was about him that he was unable to subscribe to due to his wandering thoughts but he said his ‘thank yous’ and ‘you’re welcomes’ back to the crowd. He made his way to where his friends were all sitting. “Sup, you guys.”

Fred and George were on him like flies to blood. “What was that, the-Boy-who-Lived?”

The eldest of the two responded, “yeah—we thought you had a phobia.”

“I do not have a phobia,” he glared. “It was all in a day’s work.”

Tom and Harry's eyes locked - and Harry knew he felt better than he had in weeks. Unfortunately, the storm hit hard and the four Capitol-citizens besides Tom were freaking the fuck out as the shelter the bar was in the shits, the furious wind shaking the structure. Once it calmed down, Harry directed Tom's friends back to Victor's Village with the assistance of Nathaniel, Abelene, Sibyl, Hermione, Ron, Fred, George, Ginny, and Luna. Narcissa was crying whilst Bellatrix was laughing her guts out on the floor of their house. "That was so fun, let's do it again!"

"Weren't you literally screaming your guts out?" Ron pursed his lips, confused.

But Bellatrix shook her wild, frizzed up hair. "Uh, hello no. That was Narcissa and the rest of those losers—" she rolled her eyes but Harry wasn't convinced at all. She would be screaming the same as she just had. Either way, now they had to return back to their house in the Village. Tom lingered at the doorway whilst the others behind the two of them began to leave them alone, unintentionally or intentionally on the part of Harry's friends.

Tom and Harry stepped closer so they could share a kiss; Harry murmuring against his skin, "come tomorrow early in the morning and the two of us will have some real fun. Not this artificial hiding. I'll see you, Tom."

Parting, Tom knitted his eyebrows together. "Be careful out there."

"I've lived in 12 longer than you have. I think I'll be okay."

———

Harry didn't sleep a lot during the night and was easily awake when Tom lingered over his body. Tom leant over him and pressed his knee onto the bed to kiss him. Harry moaned, wrapping both his arms around his shoulders. After checking the time, he put on his warm clothes and purposefully didn't bring any swimwear. He brought lube and kept it in his pant's pocket as the two slipped out from the back of the Village before the sun rose.

Tom brought his phone but that was the only thing he had on him. They didn't need a flashlight as the District's small lights lit up the town soundly enough for them to make it to the non-electrical fence. Hopping on his stomach, Tom followed after - patting the mud away from his jumper as the two made their way down the meadow and into the forest, Tom turned his flashlight on low as Harry worked his

way around the trees as if it was his second home. The two turned the flashlight off and kissed against the trees as they were alone with no one to bother them.

Once they were ready to move again, it took Harry about half the time longer to get Tom to the river when the sun began to rise. Tom looked disgusting, perhaps, for the first time in his life—mud all over his rain jacket, dirt on his chin and cheek, cobwebs in his hair, but still; he was grinning romantically, making eye contact with him. Harry doesn't think he's ever been more in-love with someone, especially him.

Slipping out of his clothes, Tom watched him thunder-stuck.

Harry tilted his head at him, pleased. "Aren't you going to join me?"

"You're going to be the death of me, Harry Potter."

Tom sheds his clothes naturally as if the mud and dirt didn't belong to the name Tom Riddle and Harry attached himself to Tom's naked body instantly. They moved to the inside of the house, Tom not letting his lips detach from Harry's own. In his hand, he held the lube and was quite content no matter who had to do most of the work. He could imagine Tom underneath him as much as on top of him. Either way, he was happy but Tom was the one to make the decision since he was the less experienced.

Harry was lifted onto the counter of the kitchen. Breaking apart from Tom for a mere moment, he wobbled the tube in front of him, carefree, murmuring. "What do you want to do?"

"I swear if I don't fuck you now, I'm going to go wild."

"Alright," but Tom wasn't wrong - he had a feral expression on his face.

His eyes were blown wide, like an animal wanting its prey, and his fingers were tight on his back - looking as if he wanted to merge himself with Harry. He found that he enjoyed the savage expression. It meant that Tom was desperate; and him desperate didn't always come by.

Tom took the lubricant from him and began to work his fingers in the bottle, grabbing out as much as he thought he needed. If Harry was going to be honest, he's done sex in many ways - and without lube on the receiving end so with the amount Tom was pulling out it was as if

he was scared to hurt him. Grabbed half the lube, Tom's attention back onto him—Harry took the bottle, placed it back on the counter beside them and grabbed Tom's cock, palming him.

"You don't need that much." Tom shuttered around his hand. "I'm fine with the amount you've got. Now, I'm quite happy just relaxing and teaching you what I like, yeah, so just open me up one-by-one and once I feel like I'm ready, I'll let you know."

"Fuck, your accent," his boyfriend groaned, tilting his head down.

Harry stopped palming him, thinking he might've sent him over the edge too much, especially if Tom had a voice kink of sorts but either way - he found it cute. Waiting for him to recuperate, wiping the rest of the lube on his thigh he glanced down at Tom's cock. It certainly wasn't small but it was a decent size. Harry liked that. Cocks that were too large hurt too much on the receiving end. Now, if he wasn't, it wouldn't matter - but either way, they were both a good size.

Tom recovered and told him that he was going to press a finger into him and Harry relaxed, doing this routine so many times now that he was fine and understanding of how his body reacted to different actions. He knitted his eyebrows shut when he felt the intrusion, but relaxed instantaneously allowing it to happen. Tom kissed his jaw and Adam's apple, Harry becoming extremely turned on by the situation. He had both his arms wrapped around his neck, moaning softly, letting his body control him.

When the second finger prodded at his entrance, he allowed Tom to add a second one in. Harry knew his cheeks were flushed, felt the heat in his skin sizzling underneath Tom's cooler touch, understood Tom was going crazy by the minute, unable to wait for the second he was going to be able to control the tempo. Harry was both in-control of his emotions and body but at the same time, allowed himself to let loose. Let Tom understand his body language.

He trusted him.

He would be able to do this without harm.

Tom added a third and fourth finger, because he was a paranoid man and a perfectionist. Additionally, because just as much as Harry would protect him and control Tom's body if the situation was flipped, Tom wanted Harry to know that he was his. Obsessive and possessive. Extremely cute and hot on him since he was not used to sex. If anything, Tom was going to become perfect at it in no time at all.

Tom pressed his lips to Harry's mouth, opening him wider. Harry moaned, obsessed with the way Tom wanted to touch him. This was his love language.

The touch in sex was Tom's love language. Allowing and wanting Harry to touch him was how he showed his appreciation, acceptance, and adoration for him; his love. Just as much as words were Harry's. So he spoke, because Tom deserved it. "Ah—Tom," he breathed his air in, "you're doing so well. Fuck," he shuttered, the cool air around them tingling his skin. Luckily, the sun was heating up the house. "I think if you weren't the President's successor you could get paid the same doing this as a job," he snickered. "Perhaps with my victor's earnings."

"Oh do please shut up," Tom silenced him - pressing his lips to his own.

Pulling apart, he snickered. "Temperamental, too bad I like the look on you though."

When Tom's fingers pulled out, he knew what was coming. Despite this, Harry gasped when Tom pressed into him and he moaned at the feeling. Tom bit at Harry's earlobe, groaning as he bottomed out inside of him. "Now you're quiet."

Harry shook his head, laughing, "you'll have to do a lot better to keep me quiet."

But it didn't matter. The passion between them was a mixture of words and actions. Tom was not the quiet type by any means, Harry enjoying the moments where he watched him break completely underneath his own touch; watching him grunt, groan, moan, and hiccup in surprise when Harry did something he wasn't expecting. Tom's love language might be touch, but Harry was the sex expert. He knew how to push buttons he knew Tom would melt under. Tom was a controlling bastard though so he kept doubling the passion and ferocity every time Harry did something to tease him.

Tom grew sweaty and eventually untameable when Harry kept teasing him. The sweat lingered on his forehead, the two's foreheads clashing them together as they chased each other's highs, pushing themselves further. As if it was a competition or race; they wanted to both enjoy what they had to offer. Harry found himself moaning and murmuring teases a lot more than he would've liked to admit, only because the wild look on Tom's face made him more turned on. Evil Tom appeared

quite attractive to him.

So by the time their climaxes finally came into reach and they shuttered almost together, Harry's tolerance a lot higher than Tom's, they basically collapsed over each other. Harry fell back onto the counter, Tom on his chest as he stroked the sweaty bangs from his face. Licking his palm as Tom was watching him, his boyfriend groaned. "Oh that's disgusting," he shuttered.

"You're such a baby - I bet you're attracted to the idea I wouldn't do it to anyone else."

"Wouldn't you?" Tom quirked his eyebrow, still inside of him.

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps not, considering they wouldn't give me the reaction I would be lookin' for." He adored teasing Tom. Perhaps he was Capitol-born and Capitol-raised so he was not used to being around proclaimed 'disgusting things', but it suited him. The reactions were why; the adorable disgusting glares which made Harry laugh. He betted in the future between the two of them, they'd feed more into their sadistic and masochistic wants and needs, but not now, he understood well enough. They were both still new to each other.

"Do you want to clean off a bit, we'll have to go soon."

Tom tilted his head, glancing around the place. "There's no shower."

Harry laughed, stomach clenching at the feeling of Tom still inside of him. Immediately, Harry pushed Tom back so he would detach from himself. Sitting up properly, he tilted his thumb towards the window that showed the river outside. "It's becoming warmer, more humid after the storm. It's the perfect time to take a swim out there. I was here yesterday."

"You were, wasn't it cold?"

"I managed."

Both naked and covered in cum (mainly Harry), he gazed in Tom's direction who seemed nervous about swimming in open waters like this. He sighed, knowing this wasn't going to be easy to get him to trust the water. "Tom, I promise you, there is nothing dangerous in the water. No sharks, no bugs, no insects. Only fish which we can catch and eat. There's nothing in the water, scarier than the two of us."

“But it’s cold.”

“Ah,” Harry rolled his eyes. “You’re such a baby.”

“I’m not.”

“Get in then,” he smirked. “Prove me wrong.”

A devious grin lurked on Tom’s face which Harry was concerned about. As much as Harry loved his evil look this was too suspicious for him not to bat an eye at. “Okay, if it’s not so cold then.” Tom moved closer to him and picked him up. Immediately, Harry knew what was up. Tom rushed to the water with him and then, crash!

Harry laughed as Tom screamed, shrieking that it was cold. The ladder was over by the pier so he wasn’t concerned with getting out immediately as Tom shook in the water. Harry watched him glare at him with no anger in his eyes. Beginning to wash himself like this was normal, the beautiful colours in the sky enraptured Harry. Tom moved closer to him as he touched his entrance, getting rid of all the cum and lube from inside of himself. Wrapping his arms around his neck, Tom relaxed against Harry’s warm back. “You’re the only hot thing here.”

“Figuratively or literally?” He jestered at him.

“Both,” he nodded furiously. “It’s freezing.”

Harry adored perplexed Tom. It reminded him that he was doing this for him. Trusting him in the water, when he didn’t want to, because he held a special place in his heart - and he was willing to make memories with him. Harry loved him, he knew. It wasn’t hard to determine, with a teeth-chattering Tom latched onto his neck, frozen like an icicle. This gorgeous dork.

His insults would have to come to a minimum, he knew, because at the end of the day, he would go to hell and back for Tom. Fight the deepest parts of this world to protect him. Fight the depths of his breath in the ocean to swim and retrieve Tom from the bottom. Fight the worst of people to protect his future; fight the hardest of battles if it meant he got to breathe another day. He sighed, knowing he was smitten for this shaky Capitol-raised idiot.

Harry wrapped him in a towel he had at the house, Tom - shivering - unable to control himself. “It would’ve been better in the summer,” he sighed. “Unfortunately, we were a bit preoccupied.”

Still wet, giving himself a small pat-down before he slipped back into his work clothes, he helped Tom change into his own. Harry gave Tom his jacket whilst he washed the mud from the front of his rain jacket so he had something untouched. Returning it to him, Tom thanked him softly. Harry slipped the lube into one of the draws; knowing it was going to be fine there. If anyone found it, he would be shameless and yes, admit it was his, thank you very much.

Harry hung up the towel to dry and on their walk back, began to speak about the updates on the rebels. “We don’t know the Head Game maker for the 3rd Quarter Quell yet but we managed to get in contact with District 13.”

“What?” Harry’s eyes widened. “13?”

“Yes, so Gamma—the lazy genius, was able to make contact with Neuro’s electronics. We’ve begun to schedule meetings and conversations which I know I will be missing but I’ll be informed once I return from our trip.” Harry was about to ask whether or not he should be there if he was on rebel-mission business but decided that if Tom thought it was all handled without him, he wasn’t going to complain. He was selfish and knew that if Tom wasn’t needed, then nothing would change the situation if he was there. He kissed Tom before returning back to District 12.

Slipping underneath the fence, Tom following along after him, he showed him the Weasley’s household. It was large for the size of their family of nine, but also one of the best well-kept houses of District 12 - able to use the size of their family to protect and build the house bigger. Knowing they would be awake, Harry knocked on the front door and Ginny, who was still in her pyjamas yawned, blinking like an owl when she saw them at her doorstep. “Harry,” she tilted her head. “What are you doing here?”

“Thought we should pop by, have Tom introduced to Molly and Arthur.”

“Ah,” she nodded - still waking up. “Come in then.”

Harry went in after her, the two holding hands the minute they were out of sight from the outside. Molly was up cooking with Bill, George, and Ron as Arthur started the fire, Ron and Fred making meals for their brothers whilst they were in the mines, and Ginny relaxed, sweeping the floors. Charlie passed around everyone’s medicines to each other. Percy wrote down their finances on the island table. Fred

was the first to notice them. “Harry! Tom! Nice of you both to pop around.”

He smiled at them, Molly hurrying over to plant a kiss on his forehead. “What are you boys doing up so early?—it’s like seven o’clock.”

“Don’t worry about it, Molly.” He told him. “I was showing Tom around the forest.”

All of the Weasleys paused; even Percy, the organised but stunned loving prick. He tilted his head forward, eyeing Tom. Ron smacked a hand to his forehead. But Ginny only began to laugh. Tom was beginning to become nervous underneath all the perplexed stares so Harry explained the situation. “Thought we should talk where there wasn’t anyone bound to be overhearing.”

Charlie pointed a mug at him. “Good idea.”

Besides that incident, Harry helped with the cooking - liking the preparation for the family as Tom sat next to Percy, unsure of how to interact with the family, until Percy asked Tom if he knew anything about finances and the two began to discuss the best ways to manage it. Ron nudged him, smirking shocked, stating. “If he can make Percy talk without irritating him, I think I’ll be able to manage.” Harry nudged him back, jokingly, knowing he didn’t know that Tom fucked him about an hour earlier but it didn’t matter, regardless.

He was glad his best mate accepted his boyfriend for who he was.

Harry spent the rest of the month with Tom; hiding from the peacekeepers; sneaking off moments to themselves; dodging bullets from Tom’s friends (or companions - since Tom didn’t think they were his friends); having various moments in the forest with and without Harry’s friends; spending cold mornings together in Harry’s bed; and having various moments to able to makeout. Nothing more insinuates, despite their many efforts, always being interrupted midway through. It made Tom redden furiously, which Harry didn’t mind - but what he did mind was the fact they kept getting interrupted!

Either way, the month was the best Harry had in a long time.

He was distraught when Tom had to leave.

Chapter End Notes

With 2 days left to ttpd, Imma have to see what songs relate to this fic so idk, things might change
Anyhow, I don't have much to say besides I'm sad so
Further ado

Up next, "I Know Places"
Unless things change!
See you this Sunday people

P S

I Know Places

Chapter Notes

Posted: 21st of April, 2024
TTPD, I have a lot of thoughts but enjoy this chapter first

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When winter rolled into District 12, he came to the conclusion that he wouldn't be able to spend the most of the beginning of the season helping out his community. Instead—being on the 74th Annual Hunger Games Victory Tour. Fleur strolled forward from the train station with Francisca, Morgan, Rhodes, and Bonavich in tow. They brought their suitcases and luggage, Nathaniel murmuring to Harry as they walked up the pathway of Victor's Village, "if I thought your boyfriend and his friends were preppy—these guys are horrendously dressed. How don't they know those clothes went out of style years ago."

"Fashion recycles?" Harry shrugs his shoulders. "As if you have the money for it."

Nathaniel squeaks. "Okay, maybe not but should we see you dressing up like it's the 20's?"

Harry turns to him. "Depends. I could pull it off, you surely couldn't."

The eldest family member of the Croseph's scoffed, glaring at him. Harry's temper was short today. On probation with the alcohol due to Hermione's request, he wasn't in the mood for any arguments. He'd win after all. It was the 10th of December which meant that tomorrow, he'd be off on the train with his prep team for the next two weeks and a half. Apparently, Tom got his tour extended so he would be able to see him for his birthday which meant he had to be very obedient for the Capitol for these luxuries. However, it was Tom so he was willing to do practically anything as long as it worked in both their favourites.

Although, he was glad Francisca was with him even if Tom couldn't be. She was nice. Morgan could trip over and he'd laugh, then help her up. Rhodes was a prick occasionally so perhaps he would steal sugar from him if he wanted it. Bonavich… he was kind of irrelevant so he wasn't able to make an appropriate comment on him. He gave

Francisca a large hug when he saw her purple winter outfit as she strolled up to his house. “Harry,” she placed a kiss onto his scarred cheek. “It’s so wonderful to see you again. Are you ready?”

Fleur pursed her lips at the action. “I’ll have to teach you your lines.”

“My lines?” Harry tilted his head. “What do you mean by that?”

“President Dumbledore gave me direct orders to present you in a kind of light we’re going to have to discuss in private.” Fleur wore sky blue, mimicking the snow and the festivities that were going on in the Capitol related to the winter. “Come on, let’s get settled - you have an interview to prepare yourself with the Capitol tonight.”

Surprised, he sat in the makeup chair as he watched the television technicians begin to set up a camera in the main pathway of Victor’s Village and he noticed Nathaniel, Abelene, and Sibyl getting questioned by some of the cameramen of the Capitol. Harry recognised them from when he was being recorded with Victor and Esteven. He overheard questions like, “how are you enjoying the house in the Village?” And, “what are your thoughts of your step-brother winning the Hunger Games?”

The fake story they went with was quite messy so basically he wasn’t related to any of them, Sirius his godfather so he was taken in when his parents died a mysterious death in the mines in an accident, but Sirius was to married their mother before she died (as well as their father, in the same accident) and took them in. So all of them lived together in a house they kept clean before Harry won the 74th Annual Hunger Games. As a result; step-brother. Harry technically dated his ‘step-brother’ before the 74th Games but who cares? Great sibling incest is okay in the Capitol!

Nathaniel was being dotted on like all the Croseph siblings. Talking about their gorgeous hairs, skin colours, eyes—everything and how they would be real stars in the Capitol if they were able to do some changes on the three. It made them uncomfortable so Harry brought attention to it to Francisca who brought the attention over to them.

“Hello, Harry.” The cameraman began. “How has District 12 been?”

“Ah, good.” He shuts one-eye, makeup being applied to it. “What do you think of District 12?”

“It’s okay… alright decorum and nature. So have you been keeping rumours and conspiracy theories in the Capitol?—there’s a lot.” Harry

shook his head, asking if he would tell him about some of them. “Well, there are theories that you and Barty Crouch Junior have had some blues. A scandal perhaps? All good in nature, of course.” He shrugs his shoulders, saying that any problems that are there aren’t being caused by him so he doesn’t know why they’re being caused. But yes, he lies. So whatever happens as a result of that, he couldn’t care less. The cameraman persists. “There are also the rumours of what the 75th Annual Hunger Games is going to be, thoughts?”

Harry shrugs his shoulders, pursing his lips. “The 1st Quarter Quell was members of the Districts snitching on each other. The 2nd Quarter Quell was the one that Remus Lupin won; and it was double the tributes.” He puts a finger to his lip. “Perhaps it depends on what is necessary to stir the audiences?” He theories. “Realistically speaking, I’m a mentor this upcoming year so I’ll have to assist no matter what hits us.”

The cameraman is smug. “That is a well-thought answer, Harry.”

“Thank you. I’m always vigilant.”

They go through more rumours and theories, the entire Capitol excited for the upcoming 75th Annual Hunger Games. Apparently due to the way he won his game the previous year, they think something miraculous is going to come up that tops it. Dressing in a black suit, he wore a dark onyx crown of sorts - mimicking the one he left the Capitol in. As if to say, the Victor Returns!

Nathaniel wolf-whistled at his outfit, “very grunge.”

Abelene drank a cocktail Francisca made for the occasion. “Hot and sizzling.”

Sibyl joined in due to social obligation, reluctantly. “Fuckable.”

“Sibyl Croseph!” Abelene exclaimed, knitting her eyebrows together. Nathaniel choked, glaring - shocked by his thirteen year-old sister’s proclamation. All Harry knew was that she was slowly becoming his favourite pseudo-sibling. Ladislao would’ve loved her. Actually, the thought of his District 10 ally made him tear-up. He would be facing his family in a few days. Abelene, Nathaniel, and Sibyl all sat shocked at the emotions appearing on his face. “Are you alright?”

Harry pointed at Sibyl. “That was exactly the look I was going for.”

Ladislao would’ve loved them.

Mortified and throwing her hands up into the air as if she couldn't ever win, Abelene went back to drinking the cocktail Francisca made. Then, Harry was being pushed towards the door of his house, Francisca doubling checking all of the additions they added on to Harry. He wore contacts, his hair was done up into a curly ponytail with his signature single-braid. His nails were painted black and gold. The gold was the only pigment remaining as if he was entering a new era: revenge, he hoped it was called.

Then, it was show time. Fleur told him to be lovable, but also flirtatious and arrogant as if he was loving life after the Hunger Games. Gritting his teeth at the implication, wanting to separate the Victors from the Districts even more than they already have - he agrees. Tom, he thinks, the rebellion. Let them think whatever they like about him: he was submissive, obedient, mallable—fuck all that, he's a rebel in disguise burning that shit of a farce to the ground.

Remember, anything for outcomes.

Let them think you're weak.

The door opened and it was show time.

Smiling softly at the camera as he saw a hologram of Barty Crouch Junior standing before him, he glared at him but kept his dainty smile. Innocent, pure—he lies to himself. Generous, obedient, desirable. The announcer began and Harry answered all his questions with a lie, a calculating smile on his face. His words. Both a weapon, and his love language. His skin. Both a lie and a burning truth. His outfit. A blessing in disguise and burden. His body language. A story underlining the entire legitimacy of his words: confirmation.

Exiting after Barty told him to have a wonderful night, the crowd loving him, he sighed once the interview was over and the camera turned down to confirm to him it was done. He returned inside, trudging forward with annoyance. Opening his arms to hug all three pseudo-siblings, he whispered to them. "I hate everything and everyone."

"Okay," Abelene sighed. "A serious problem, then."

"Where's the Sirius in problem?"

Harry patted Sibyl's back. "Love you dearly, too. You shall be the only one to survive."

“You know just how to make people feel appreciated,” Nathaniel grumbles. “Don’t you?”

“A rebel without a cause is certainly how I’m feeling right about now.”

“Go to bed.”

“‘Kay, mum.”

Harry went upstairs.

“The absolutely, unnecessary sass within that boy.”

Harry left around midday the next morning. It took a lot longer due to traffic, however. Fred and George, the absolute troublemakers they were, told everyone to spew into the train-station and stay there to see him go as an attempt to make him stay in District 12. He both loved the idea and hated the trouble it was causing him. Fleur was pissed being unorganised and late but Francisca whispered, saying how she adored the Twins. Harry was going to ask for their autographs for her later. She would appreciate them.

On the train, he got his own suite and was allowed to chill out for the first night on the train before they returned to business the following morning with District 11. Rex and Malia’s District. Harry read the script he was to hold on the stage. It was boring to read and recite, so he decided he would practice in the morning when Fleur would be watching him to give him tips. No need to worry about it before then. Watching a movie Tom recommended to him, Five Nights Before The Last he found the story to be romantic and upsetting.

He sent a picture of him crying to his boyfriend. ‘Curse you. That ending was cruel.’

‘I liked it.’

‘Course you did, you psycho.’

‘Hey, you liked me—and picked me, who’s the psycho?’

‘Definitely, you.’

‘Believe what you want to, love.’

Harry went to sleep with romantic-sad endings on his mind. Waking up, even more pissed than usual because Tom had to recommend to him a bad ending - he had a nightmare about the ending of their relationship through Tom's death. Or his. He can't remember, he wasn't exactly lucid but he hated and despised the thought. Dressed, reciting his lines over breakfast, Fleur snapped at him again. "Where is the energy? The emphasis."

Remus sighed at Harry. "He's not in the mood, Fleur. Can't you see that?"

"He's on live television in less than three hours!"

"I'm sad," he grumbles into his cereal.

Francisca touches his shoulder. "What's wrong?"

"Tom and I separating."

"Gosh," Fleur grumbled. "That child."

"What?!" Remus gaped, "you guys broke up?"

"No—what?" Harry blinked, red rings around his eyes, realising how he worded that sentence due to his completely exhausted brain. "No! Uh hell no. We didn't break up. I had nightmares about it last night due to him recommending me a sad ending romance movie last night." He scooped a lot of wet cereal into his mouth. "I'm just sad about that, though."

"Teenagers, I swear."

"You're like Abelene. Do you like her?"

"Your step-sister?"

"Yes," Harry swallowed his mouthful. "She likes to reprimand me, always."

Fleur thinks about it for a moment before shrugging her shoulders, seeming less tense than she did a few minutes previously. Francisca smiles at Fleur, then back at Harry. "I think anyone would like both your sisters, they were very beautiful and loving." Loving?—Harry never knew Francisca was a cold-blooded liar. "I do think, despite this, a lot of Capitol teenagers are in-love with your step-brother though." Perhaps he was being a bit dramatic but he wasn't being

dramatic when he said: yes, he did (past-tense) crush on Nathaniel too. Dated him even. Get in line. Fleur admitted she liked his step siblings more than him and Harry accepted her comment.

He wore a dark royal blue shirt and black linen pants. Like the day before, his hair was up in a ponytail with the braid hanging by the side of his face. Francisca redid it after the previous one she did before he left the Capitol as his hair was growing longer. Standing before District 11, he noted that this year - he, the victor, wouldn't be rushing through the District's to get to the Capitol. He would be catered an extra five hours allocated to each District.

However, before he spent his free-time roaming around like a sightseer, he would have to perform the speech. Gritting his teeth to control himself in-front of the crowd, he gulped before he began to read the contents of the card Fleur wrote for him. The families of Rex and Malia stood there, vulnerable, as he stood there - protected. "Thank you," he began, thanking the crowd for their welcoming claps. "I'm honoured to be here with you today. And to be with the families of your fallen tributes."

Harry glanced down at his cards, nervous - what they said on them were inhumane and dismissive. He took a deep breath, reading slowly from the card. He reworded it ever-so carefully, and calculatingly. "What your tributes did during the games and out of the games was honourable to your District." Rebellion, the word spoke clearly in his head. Think of alliances.

"I didn't know Rex, or Malia very well." Harry fiddled with the card as if he was reading from it, he put it down - looking at the families of the two tributes. "However, I associated enough with them to know who they were. Strategic, clever, loving." The Capitol loved his Angel of Death persona; this was really going to feed it to them whilst confronting the rebellion at hand. His words could change the world irreversibly. Think, be clear. Outshine the master. "Rex understood what it meant to be in the Games. So did Malia. Do whatever you think is necessary to win. Rex chose the lonesome path. Malia chose the path with the Careers, both noble. I think of them sometimes, doing mundane things. Understanding them and for what they were. Survivors—strong, united forces. I think either of them could've been here standing before your District today, whether with a different arena, or another set of circumstances."

"They were believers of many things—their communities. I know if I wasn't here, I would've liked if someone did this for my family but…"

Harry gulped, pulling out the card again. It said in the bold font 'don't cause a commotion!' He sighed. "I would like to give one twelfth of my winnings split between the two families of Rex Watts and Malia Keist in honour of the fight their children put up for the sake of District 11."

"An honourable battle," he added. "I thank you all for giving them life, and community."

Nerves tingle deep underneath his skin when Harry sees it. In the distance to the stage, the single raised hand with three fingers lowered and two tallest fingers were held high, alongside the four-whistle tune. Harry shook. A young dark-skinned woman smiled brightly at him. She looked like an angel in that moment as he breathed heavily, two peacekeepers coming forward to him—as peacekeepers dashed into the crowd. He gulped, taken as he watched the woman being dragged forward to the stage. "No—No!"

The door shut before he saw the gunshot.

He heard the sound and screams, despite this.

He shook, and he was thrown to the concrete of the building.

"Harry," Remus ran forward from upstairs. "Are you okay?"

"Remus—" he heaved and shook. "Why—why must they kill people?"

Fleur glared down at him whilst Francisca helped him up. "You were supposed to stick to the script, Harry Potter! Not run off and splurge whatever you want to those people." He was taken back to the train station where he was to stay. No extra five hours in District 11 as Francisca drew him a warm bath. She wet his curls and washed them. "They don't get you," she began. "They can't give the wind a piece of paper expecting it to fly around forever."

Harry sniffled, ignoring the calls he was getting from Tom on his phone. Francisca sighed at the tune of Tom's ringtone. He asked what she meant by that. "You're a forever moving concept. You don't stay for one thing like the card, you search for meaning and depth. Perhaps those tributes you alloted your earnings to their families weren't so eager to do the same. Savour the glory - I think you're quite unique and it's why Tom likes you. He wouldn't have done the same."

They were different, Harry knew. Tom had fundamentally different logics to him but when it came to the important stuff - who mattered

to them the most - they agreed. Perhaps in different sizes, Harry cared about a lot more people than Tom but Tom and Harry both agreed that protection over their loved ones came first. Especially in this world.

He frowned. “How am I supposed to do this another ten times?”

“Think on the bright side. You get to go to District 10 next. You’ll have a lot to say there.” Francisca smiled brightly at him. “No one there is going to disagree with you when you speak about Imelda or Ladislao because you cared about them, even when Imelda betrayed you. Trust speaks volumes above what happens at that speech. Okay?”

Harry falls asleep content in the bathtub.

He walked up to the stage at District 10 in completely white silk clothes. His braid had a small tied-up yarn attached to it and his hair was out, flowing. It was to his shoulders and growing longer, quicker. He was probably going to have it cut at some point after the Victory Tour. The citizens of District 10 were eagerly waiting and applauding his arrival, he inhaled nervously. That morning, Fleur was beating it into his skull to read from the script. He didn’t have the heart to. Not for Imelda’s memories. Not for Ladislao’s. This script did them dirty and his allies wouldn’t have that sort of light bestowed upon their battles.

The speech started off the same. “Thank you. I’m honoured to be here with you today. And the families of your fallen tributes.” It was the only true thing about the script. He’d let the Capitol have this one win. “Imelda and Ladislao were incredible people.” He fiddled with the card, staring at their families. Their faces hung behind the families sadly. He gulped, straightening up. “Imelda was one of the most fascinating people I’ve ever had the pleasure of meeting. She was funny, strong, kind, and like I said to Ladislao - incredibly protective of whatever she thought was worth saving. And we agreed on something, if you can imagine.”

A small laughter arose from the crowd at the joke.

“We both agreed that if it came down to the three of us at the end of our alliance, we would give our lives up for Ladislao.” Although, what he said then came as a shock to the District. “Imelda was eighteen, I was the same age as Ladislao - but we both came to the silent agreement, out of the two of us the most bright and caring of the group would survive.” He smiled briefly. “I’ll give it to her, she was

protective from the start to the end—and for what it matters," looking up at Imelda's family. "She must be one of the strongest women I've ever met. You've done well."

Imelda's mother began to cry at the statement, he felt sorry but knew the words would come to mean something by the end of this if he didn't have another dead body on his hands. He breathed in, turning to Ladislaos' family. "Ladislao was my first friend; my first ally. Out of everyone in the arena, he was the most compassionate. Had the biggest heart. I know they like to pin me down to be the emotional one, but Ladislao was the funniest and most giving person I've ever met. I do think of Ladislao a lot when I'm at home, I'll admit more than Imelda, but it's because I see him in almost everyone I know. The beauty in people."

"Imelda is for a certain delicacy amongst my friends - where I see her; and these two tributes were worth trusting. Worth putting my lives into their hands, even if it meant giving it up to protect or lie there as the other lived. Likewise, I'd like to give a twelfth of my victor earnings to the families of Imelda Garcia and Ladislao Ladrón. I know, either of them would've done it in a heartbeat. And I definitely think their memories are worth remembering. I know I will. Forever."

"Thank you," he gulped. "I'm gonna head off now."

Quickly spinning on his heel, he raced off the stage before he could hear the whistle — but didn't make it on time before he heard the sound of the four-toned tune. He did get behind the doors before the gunshot was released and away from the door. Fleur found him and glared, "Harry Potter. What did I tell you about reading the script this time?"

"Those were my allies, my friends—I'm not about to say their lives were great supports to my win. They wouldn't of, I'm certainly not going to disregard them like that." He glared at her, before fiercely stomping away back to the train station with his stylists. Fleur followed behind them and he went on. "I didn't ask for them to lay down their lives for me. I care about those tributes. I know they do too, but none of them would want to see their community members dead."

"Your actions caused this," Fleur told him. "If you read the script."

"They'd know I was lying if I did. I don't think I could."

"You played the Games, Harry." She knitted her eyebrows together.

“You won. Perform.”

He found out five died for him at District 10. One fifteen year-old boy. A couple in their thirties. An elderly man. And a woman in her twenties. Harry was allowed to take a look around District 10 but only with the assistance of the mayor inside one of the peacekeeper vehicles. It was sad and gloomy, watching where Imelda and Ladislao grew up. Returning to the train station by five o’clock, they left - heading towards District 9.

Harry wore gold for District 9 due to their grain supplement and stepped out to the stage with defiant looks in the peoples’ eyes. He gulped, glancing down at the cards. A bruise was lingering on his good cheek due to Fleur and Harry fighting over the cards earlier that morning. He began. “Thank you. I’m honoured to be here with you today. And the families of your fallen tributes.” Looking up at Rante and June families—having to learn their names on the train, he pursed his lips. “I didn’t know much about either Rante or June. They were young and timid, understandably so which meant nobody really knew of them. There are a lot of things I don’t know about the two children but I know they were clever. Rante was efficient with understanding specific battle strategy patterns and June was capable at handing a bow and arrow. Unfortunately, the arena wasn’t kind to them. Despite this, I don’t think it’s fair for their families not to receive the same treatment as the others’. A twelfth of my winnings will be split between the two families of Rante Locksong and June Dusk.”

Halfway through the end of his final statement a whistle went so he almost bolted before he finished—quickening up the rate at which he said his statements. He left, hurried afterwards and heard the gunshots. Two, he counted. He cried this time and Remus needed to comfort him. If anyone was like Sirius in this situation, it would be him. Francisca took care of him afterwards, saying how none of it was his fault but the fault of their own. If they didn’t want to die, they would’ve stayed silent.

However, from then on he read from the cards. Nobody liked that, despite the attention on at the end about a twelfth of his winnings split between the two families. People were upset and angry with him, shouting about how to stop reading the cards because they wanted to know what he actually meant. He nervously stood, not knowing how much more of this he could take. Then, District 3 came around. Fifteen more people died since District 9—even when he wasn’t speaking from his heart. No matter what he did, they wouldn’t stop dying. District 3 would be the same, he knew instinctively -

immediately. This was Silver's District.

"Thank you," he wore a jade colour scheme. "I honoured to be here with you today. And the families of your fallen tributes…" Esteven was staring at him, he bit his inner-cheek, glancing back down at the cards. Bullshit, per usual. He put the card into his pocket. "Silver was raised well. In a safe environment, perhaps told of the nature of the games, perhaps discussed that he trained for wielding - regardless of whether or not he got chosen. But he did. He was strong physically. He had the looks. And he had the intelligence. What he was lacking was the ability to survive." Harry put both his hands into both his pockets, fiddling around with the card that was in there in the one it was in. "Silver wasn't able to do what it meant to survive. His heart was made out of gold. Originally, the story goes that the Careers went up to him and asked if he wanted to join - but he was perplexed. I know because I was there."

"I'm not a good person - if anyone I know is, it was Silver. He found the proposal complex, and didn't find a reason to join them. He didn't need extra strength, he didn't need the awe the Capitol was going to supply him because he was already conventionally attractive, and he was able to get sponsors on his own due to his intelligence. However, what made the Careers realise he was 'weak' it was the fact, he tried to help people during our training." Harry nibbled on his bottom lip. "As I said, I didn't help him when he was taunted or tormented by the Careers - realistically, it was a free-for-all type of situation but even then, on the last day he came over to me after he was getting pissed off at them mocking him."

"I sat there, unmoving during the whole event and stared at him. I wasn't a victor. I didn't know if I was going to survive or not, but between the two of us - he was the powerhouse with a heart. It was the most detrimental weakness - but I decided he either needed to straighten his back and fight back, or he would pick his own fate. Basically, I told him to grow up and see the games for what they meant and that kindness wouldn't find him here unless he made it. Regardless."

"So in the arena, I didn't see Silver at all until the fourth floor. I didn't know where he was except above me, but I was too taught up in other affairs than to worry about him. Then, I found Alistar - and then I found him. I'm not angry, I'm just trying to say people can't change instantaneously but I was glad Silver stood up to Alistar. He was one of his biggest tormentors outside of the arena. But that's not to say I'm furious at Alistar either. Like I said, people can't change instantly. We

all acted as we knew how to. The Careers baited only the weakest. I can understand them."

"But that's too much information on him, but there's nothing else I would do with those memories anyway. I thought you should know." He turned to Lux's family. "I don't know a whole lot about Lux like I do with Silver, mainly because she wouldn't talk to me - but she was ambitious and had a stronger desire to survive than Silver. She abandoned him because it was the path she saw to winning. I'll admit, getting out of the prison was a better idea than staying inside for all it was worth at the beginning. But, if there was anything I can say about her is that I respect her. She fought hard and that won't go unspoken. So… as I've done to all the Districts beforehand, I'd like to split a twelfth of my winnings between the two families of Silver Graves and Lux Reed."

He turned around before he could hear the whistle, however, it was a voice instead. "Please, Harry." Esteven spoke up. "We don't need the money. I'm a victor."

He glared at her before glancing down at her two children. He stepped forward towards the microphone again. "It doesn't matter whether you receive it, I'm not having it. Distribute it however you see fit." Harry knew Dumbledore didn't want to see allies happening in the tour. So he wouldn't 'cooperate' as per demand. He left and he heard gunshots regardless of what happened once the door shut.

"Boy," Fleur glared at him. "What are you doing?"

"Give him a break, Fleur." Francisca touched the bruise. "This is already hard for him."

They walked him back to the train where they were going to stay until five o'clock when they had to leave. Francisca was acting a lot like a mother, pestering and coddling him but he found he didn't mind it. It relaxed him and comforted, knowing that Tom would rather want her here, looking after him in replacement for him than not. He found himself asleep a few hours earlier than usual.

Waking up from a night terror late at night, he walked around the train, bored. He was looking for something to do or eat when he came across a compartment at the front of the train which had train conductors inside. They were discussing something. "Uprisings in District 10, 8, 7, 4, and 3."

"Under control?"

“Soon. The peacekeepers were taking control of the riots.”

Harry was leaning against the wall of the hallway to balance himself, but his right arm gave out and he smacked his head against the metal. He knitted his eyebrows together in pain and one of the conductors came out from the room. “Mr. Potter, you need to return to bed.” He whimpered in pain due to his head and the conductor stepped forward and pressed a hand to his head. Picking him up and carrying him back to his room, he placed him on his bed. “You will stay here until the morning, no more wandering off.” The conductor eyed his body from head to toe in interest as Harry eyed him from the bed.

However, the conductor only shut the door behind him.

The next morning he woke up groggily, wondering if what he saw the night before was real or not. He slept in and they allowed it before he was put onto the makeup chair and put into his clothes for the next speech. They were inside of District 2 and waiting for him as he ate breakfast and got prepared for the morning. Wearing a deep black that had blue accents, he stepped onto the stage with his new card in his hand. He bit his bottom lip shakily, he killed Valor personally. Although, he supposed Valor caused him permanent damage for life (but he’s dead.) Stepping onto the stage with the card, he read it. “Thank you. I'm honoured to be here with you today.”

“And the families of your fallen tributes…”

He got an apple thrown at him. Dodging swiftly, the peacekeepers immediately took that as a threat against his life. He knitted his eyebrows together, closing his eyes, not wanting to see death. “Can you guys do that after I’m done with the speech, please?” He asked the three peacekeepers who held the person hostage. He didn’t want to look at them. Harry didn’t look good, he knew; dark circles underneath his eyes, a bruise on the side of his face due to the night before, and the fading green bruise underneath his cheek. It basically looked as if he was being tortured at that point (and mentally, he was.)

They stopped to listen to him. “I’m almost done.” He hurried the speech. “Valor and Susan were formidable tributes in the arena and if partnered up together were quite the team. They were capable, strong, and harsh opponents. Susan and I actually got along before the games and Valor was, say the least, less friendly to me than anyone else. If partnered up with someone else, I don’t think we would’ve won against him.” He breathed out, reading the last lines of the card. “We

are all of us united, both victors and vanquished, and in serving a common purpose. Thank you."

Outrage hit the District and Harry was assisted by the peacekeepers back behind the stage. He vomited once he was off-stage, this entire Victory Tour irritating the fuck out of him. Remus held him as he cried and he didn't move from the ground for a long time. Francisca fed him broth once he got back into the train station and he sat there, watching Fleur pace. "I'm sorry."

"You're uncontrollable." She shook her head, angry. "We're in the Capitol in two days - you need to get your act together, Harry."

He rested in his bedroom, dreading District 1's speech. Like how he imagined all of the previous Districts to be — District 1 was the same with his imagination. It was luxurious in comparison to the rest of the Districts. He stepped up to the stage in a soft silk that had a tinge of pink in the white. He stood on the stage, hoping District 1 wasn't going to be as bad as District 2. Harry really wanted a drink as he stepped towards the microphone. "Thank you," he nodded to the crowd. "I'm honoured to be here with you today. And the families of your fallen tributes." Alistar's family stood there and so did Persephone's.

He nervously bit his bottom lip, thinking about what to say to the two of them. "Both Alistar and Persephone were mighty opponents in the arena. They knew what they wanted and how to fight to both receive it. Persephone and I got along before the arena," he admitted. "She was sweet and fashionable, belonging to the Capitol, and she was knowledgeable. Don't let her swift death fool you about her. She was a mighty opponent worthy of representing District 1. I didn't have a lot of adversity during the training days due to lack of presence until I scored a zero so nobody harassed me."

"But Alistar and Persephone only did their bit with the prospect that everything they did to practice for the arena was helping save their lives. Alistar was the strongest, I think out of all of us, perhaps second to only Sallie Add. He was vicious and wanting to survive to return back here, his home. They both were. And I killed him," he harshly exhaled. "There were six of us still remaining when he passed. If anything, I'm sort of glad I killed him - no matter how harsh that sounds. I'm glad I killed Silver. I don't think they would've survived against the prisoners."

"Thank you for listening to me, and I offer both Alistar Fenlon and

Persephone Ryde's families the same deal as I have with everyone's before me. A twelfth of my winnings split between the two families. I know, they might've not done the same thing, but you deserve it nonetheless." He exited without expecting the outcome of his speech to be anything good.

Harry slept in Remus' room that night, unable to sleep without screaming. At least Remus was a familiar person; a victor like him, understanding to all the pains he had to go through. Remus let him sleep in as they entered the Capitol. It wasn't until eleven o'clock when he woke up to a nightmare, slipping out of his room, exhausted. Francisca drew him a bath and his stylists helped him change and dress him up for the Capitol. He was in a violet suite, with his lips lined with a dark cherry liner, with lip gloss making his lips glowing.

It was the 24th of December.

His eyes were done with his natural lashes untouched. Everything about him was perfect and Harry was recognisable. This was the Boy-Who-Lived; done up, as the victor he was supposed to be. Harry was distraught and began crying to which Fleur slapped him, shouting at him to stop or else his makeup would be completely ruined but he couldn't. Francisca helped him but the other stylists only looked at him in pity, Morgan told Fleur to back off and that she was making everything worse but she only argued back. It was a mess.

Upon entering the Capitol with his makeup redone and suit on magnificently well; he walked with Fleur up the stairs - making their way to the Mansion. Dumbledore's Mansion, where Tom was unknown to be. Must, he thought. It was already late at night, six o'clock, the sun setting. "The Presidential Palace. The party of the year," Fleur recited. "Harry - you must be vigilant and wake. Speak to everyone who wants to speak to you, converse with all the guests with a smile, obey anything the President wants you to do." If you want to live, was unspoken.

"There are going to be photographers. Interviews. Be happy, content with your new life as a victor. They'll all here to celebrate you." As they made it to the top of the stairs, Harry breathed in. "Breathe it in Harry - this is all for you. I've never seen a party this grand before."

"Come, come."

The applause was loud and the expectations were met. There were people breathing fire, people touching his clothes as they passed, Fleur

was in her element. Smiling at the Capitol-citizens, waving, and telling them to excuse them as they pass. “Come along,” the Capitol loved him. Although, he didn’t engage in any conversations yet. Fleur began to show him around, pridefully. The Capitol citizens didn’t know about the hardships he had to experience on the Victory Tour.

Tom was no where to be found.

Once inside, Fleur found her friends and Harry was separated from her, the escort telling him to mingle with the other guest. She told him that all of the guests wanted to meet him. His smile thinned and he turned on the foot of his heel to head in the other direction. Mingling, he nodded, he can do that. He found himself at the dining room where guests were feeding him different sets of meals. By the end, he was full - and left. He knew no one but the guests seemed to be enjoying themselves around him. Act, act, act — the mantra in his head rang.

He was on the dance floor with some of the guests wanting to lead him. Harry allowed it for the sole opportunity to meet the one person who he wanted to. Tom Riddle. His boyfriend swung around from dancing with another woman, asking if he may take Harry from one of the guests he was dancing with. She smiled and blushed at Tom, allowing the President’s successor to take his hands. Touching, even with his hands, was a comforting blessing. “You look awful,” was the first thing Tom said to him. “What happened?”

“Didn’t read from the cards,” he sighed. “Dumbledore is going to kill me.”

“You sound reserved.”

“What other way am I suppose to say it?—uprisings, Tom. District’s 10, 8, 7, and 4.” Tom’s eyes shot wide, and he tightened his grip as if to knock it off with the surprised reaction. “This was a few nights ago. Had a nightmare, woke up late at night, wandered around, found myself overhearing the information from the train conductors. I don’t even want to know what happened in 3, 2, or 1 after I left.”

“You did an excellent job despite this.” Tom commended. “The rebels are content. So is 13.”

“Thank you, lover. I surely appreciate hearing the praise.”

Tom sighed, “you don’t need to say it like that. I’m sorry I asked this of you.”

“You didn’t ask me for anything.” Harry wanted to consume Tom, wanted to ravish him for all he was worth. “I did it because I felt like I had to - for them. Don’t worry about it.” He claimed, “if it works out for the plan everything will be okay at the end of the day. You’ll have to tell me about the information you’ve collected over the past three months as well.”

“Of course,” Tom flushes. “I’d like you to meet someone.”

“Oh?”

“Kingsley Shacklebolt, this year’s Head Game Maker—“ he directed him from the dance floor over to the side where Kingsley was watching the two of them. “Abraxas lost out.” Harry smiled, content, at the news. The Head Game Maker held out a hand to Harry and he took it. Tom watched the exchange with sharp eyes.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Harry Potter. Shall we have a dance, you don’t mind do you, Tom?”

“Not at all,” Tom said reservedly. “I’ll converse with you later.”

“Okay,” Harry gulped.

Kingsley Shacklebolt took his arm and guided him to the dance floor.

Everything about this interaction felt weird to Harry. Worried, knowing he was in a fox’s den without a way to escape, he wanted to get away, run, and hide forever where no one could find him. Hopefully, discussing whatever rebel plans Kingsley Shacklebolt must be involved with does that for Harry and Tom. He hopes he can hide and never look back. Dumbledore must be knowledgeable about Tom and him by now, he knows, so what happens now? Why isn’t he doing anything? Harry was paranoid. He’d find out later why he wasn’t doing anything to him.

Chapter End Notes

> I think TTPD is ok. I'm not overly interested in Tay's personal life (because I've got my own) so the album didn't 100% resonate with me. But I do think it's layered with a lot of different things other people can enjoy. I do think there was too much synth, so when the double album came out - I enjoyed that a lot more. Too be honest, I really don't like album drops because I feel kind of pressured to listen to it instead of enjoying it so... I'm not going to think too deeply about it now. But I do think Jack and Tay need a

break from each other, just so they explore their horizons more? Whilst I know Jack has helped Tay make some great music, they're not correlating anymore. I know why TTPD sounds erratic and unput-together; 1975's style, Matt Healy, the gist. And why she did that, the Eras Tour, critics, general public.

But when it comes to consumable music, I'm going to be honest. I can't relate. Our mindsets are quite different, and whilst ICDIWABH and WAoLOM? are the only digestible tracks I can listen to (on TTPD, not :TA) without needing to comprehend every lyric, every word - to just enjoy the music. There are going to a few comments I make. Firstly, TTPD is made the way it is because of the Ears Tour w/ the new influx of fans and people being so obsessed with knowing every little bit of Tay Tay's life. And that there won't be another album like TTPD every again, (probably-don't quote me on it) because of how personal it is. And the Anthology is how she's probs going to be writing her songs from now on, but again (don't quote me on that.) And... this is it. Either way, I'm going to put TTPD to rest and not really mention it again because, no offence, it's not my cup of tea because of the reasons above. And I'm going to say, whilst it does sound a bit messy and icky--because of it's targeted audience--it's a part of the journey, and she's smart.

She always has been w/ her music. No need to worry about spoilers because of the 2am album; outsmarts critics, and takes part the various swifties (with her personal life + the unique messiness of the album)--I'm going to say she's played her cards right. Although, I don't like the line about wanting to go back to 1830s just because... context. And I'm also going to say like most artists, I separated the art from the artists because I don't like thinking what they've done (or lack thereof) to represent who I am in a personal manner, because... parasocial relationships aren't something I'm going to be in the masses of.

So, Tay Tay is smart with her music. But she hasn't done a lot of representing of issues when she could've have, but that's her choice. And I'm only an observer. I just do find it unfortunate with her large standing, she hasn't done more but like I said, whatvs. It's not my choice.

So--that's it. My thoughts on TTPD and Tay-Tay. Like her, don't. Do what y like--but--I'm going to like her music, still have my choice in what I like about it and what I don't, and just enjoy my own life. My sis is pretty obsessed with her so I'm going to keep

my critics about her from her because she enjoys Taylor, and after the abuse of our mum, it's good for her to have a female role model in her life (because--Taylor is a role model, maybe not in relationships but in business, making money, having ambitions, etc.) Just so you know, I like keeping up with pop-culture. It entertains me, and I also like forming my own opinions about it so I'm not shortsighted. So, yeah. It's why this rant has happened, so it's out of my system.

Anyway...

Thank you guys so much for 4000 hits and 88 kudos guys. All your comments and subs inspire me!
Sorry this is late, I had soccer earlier today.
We lost 3-5 but we were 3-1 the first half before they scored 4 consecutive goals.
(They're the best in the League, so... I think we did fairly well considering the other two games they've previously played, they had 7 and 8 goals, without taking any.)
My dad said I was good and still learning; that the other team were much experienced women. But that with the level I'm on atm I'm pretty good, and I've got a lot more improvement to go. I don't feel sad. Just, awake. Yeah & the day before I was in an interview with some 'people' about exchange overseas for a year next year. I'm tired & busy, but not sad. Anyway
Gosh I'm rambling today

Thank u for enjoying my fanfic & reading this far, it means a lot to me :)

I also find it rlly funny about the theories of MsKingBean89 and Tay Tay on TikTok. Black Dog, Peter, the lyrics.
Anyway, I think my favs are Cassandra and The Albatross.

Up next, "Lavender Haze - Dress"
Lmk ur thoughts & pls don't diss me, I rlly don't have the energy (it's just an opinion)
I might delete this later

FREE PALESTINE **P S**

Lavender Haze & Dress - Back To December

Chapter Notes

Posted: 25th of April, 2024
Sorry for late post u guys
Was sick & busy yesterday & today
ANYWAY

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kingsley Shacklebolt was the successor to Sybill Trelawney. He moved Harry around, contentment on his face. Harry's lips were depleting of all joy he could muster. "How are you enjoying the party?" He asked him, Harry shrugged his shoulders tiredly. Okay. Coping. Kingsley nodded his head at his statement. "I'm having quite an interesting time. You weren't wrong when you spoke to Barty Crouch Junior last August. Tom Riddle is an excellent successor to the President." That caught his attention. Really? How?

"He's a businessman like me. They were lucky to catch him when they did." He was referring to the rebels. "I'm supposing you had a hand in his change of heart?" Yes. "Well, after a lot of propositions and debate I've been chosen to lead this upcoming year's Quarter Quell. Quite interesting to say the least."

"You know the switch of events?"

"Yes," Kingsley nodded his head. "Tom does not. Do not ask."

Harry supposed he could agree with that. He swung around on the floor with Kingsley leading him. He asked what happened to the previous Head Game Maker, due to the President's obvious likes for her. Kingsley explained with limited detail. "An offer was made. She was getting to the age where she no longer held her uses. Apparently, the last games proved it to Dumbledore and she was to retire. She passed, a month later."

"Due to medical issues?" Harry prompted.

"Of sorts."

Dumbledore killed her.

"Being the Head Game Maker has never been the most secure job in

the world," but Kingsley had other goals in mind which made it worth it to him. He didn't need to ask why he was there. Ambition, Kingsley told him. The chance to make the games mean something. Harry tilted his head, "the games don't mean anything." The Head Game Maker shrugged his shoulders, "I dunno. I suppose it was you that inspired me to come back."

Then, the sound of Panem's theme song began. "Ah, the Presidential welcome. I'm sure we'll meet again someday." Kingsley bowed his head gently in his direction before heading off. Harry was jumped by his escort to follow through to where the President was waiting. He stood there, nervous. Did Harry think that he convinced the President he was innocent?—not involved with any rebel plans. Pure?

He knew Dumbledore didn't need to tell him to his face that he wanted this but how he did it, balancing on the fine line of defying the Capitol and defying the Districts… was he able to fulfil his duty? He would find out shortly. Harry clapped softly for the president as he stepped out onto the balcony. He was swearing plum. "Tonight, on this, the last day of his tour. I want to welcome our victor. The sole youthful champion of the 74th Annual Hunger Games who embodies our ideals of strength and valour." Harry grew cold.

"Your strength and dedication has inspired us. And I know it will go on inspiring us for the rest of your life," he was scaring him. This was a scare-tactic. He lifted his glass and fireworks went off behind him. He didn't turn, glancing back up to Dumbledore. He knew who he was. His parents. Where was Tom?—what was going to happen to him?

Dumbledore shook his head whilst everyone was distracted. Harry failed his mission.

His week in the Capitol was cut short. He was only there for three days instead of the seven. Missing Tom's birthday entirely. In actuality, he spent most of his time on the train instead of being with Tom. He only saw Tom once during the entire stay before he headed back—Harry was desperate to talk with him about the things he wanted to know and say.

District 12 welcomed him with open arms.

The speech to District 12 was broadcasted every like all the other Districts. "I return to my District unlike the tributes to their own.

Their camaraderie aided me in my victory," he read from the card, "and I'm thankful to the Capitol for blessing us with a luxurious time spent together before obeying the peace treaty made seventy-four years prior in exchange for my life." He glanced up to his District members and saw Sedge's family amongst them, he began to say. "Like I have previously," he said off-script, "one twelfth of my winnings would be split between the District twelve tributes, myself, and Sedge Pines' family in honour for the performance they displayed in the games." It was weird talking about himself in third person.

"For Panem, in honour of Panem, for the sake of us all—may the Hunger Games ever be fulfilled for the purpose of what they upheld. Order, control, and safety. May the odds be ever in your favour, like they were in mind." Stepping off the stage, nobody killed themselves here. They all accepted his words and knew not to do that to him. This was his home; not anymore. But they know him better than all of those other Districts.

He hid in his bedroom, locking the door with a knife in his hand.

"Harry," Abelene banged on the door. "You've got to come out at some stage."

He didn't respond.

A week passed by.

"I'm going to break this door down, Harry." Nathaniel said. "The Weasleys will help me."

"Go away!"

"Harry…" it was late at night and a soft voice familiar to him spoke against the door. "It's been two weeks. Open up, bud." Harry shivered against hearing the voice of Sirius at his door. He had been gone for months. He hadn't seen him since that week after the games ended. Harry sobbed and didn't. Sirius must've heard him. "Hey, it's alright—I know. I've been a prick leaving you gone for so long… I'm proud of you, kid. You've been so strong."

"I don't want to be strong," he screamed at him. "I want to be weak and left alone!"

It was silence on the other end.

“Yes, you do deserve peace. I know.”

Harry’s eyes were red, he twitched, his body was shaky, he hadn’t eaten in days due to his lack of want to do anything. His lack of strength to live to the next day. He wanted to die. He wanted this nightmare to end, the night terrors, the speeches, the acting. He didn’t want to do any of this anymore. Silver was weak but Harry was weaker. He couldn’t kill a man unless he was with a team or already half dead. He wouldn’t win against the Capitol - not if he didn’t have Tom. And Dumbledore, he was making sure Tom didn’t see him anymore. He was a mess.

The door clicked open. Sirius pushed the door forward to see him, sitting there, unmoving. He pointed his knife at him. “You were gone. Gone for months, what makes you think I want to see you?” Sirius sat there, unsure of what to do. If he cared that much, he shouldn’t have left.

Nathaniel glanced down at Harry from above Sirius. “Move,” he told Sirius.

Stepping over him, he grabbed the knife from Harry’s hands and picked him up, dragging him downstairs to the bathtub there. Abelene smiled softly when she saw him. Sibyl was drawing the bath apparently, as Nathaniel took off his shirt. “You smell,” he comments and Harry glares up at him with anger. “I didn’t ask for you to help me.”

“Sirius knows how to unlock locks better. I would’ve if I knew how to - which I think I’ll learn now.” It doesn’t matter that he’s naked, Nathaniel’s already seen everything. He turned to Sibyl who sat there, watching Harry. “I need you to wash him please, and whatever you do - make sure he doesn’t lock the door behind him, thanks?”

Sibyl takes care of Harry. He sits there, not wanting to come to terms with reality.

Washing his back and shoulders, careful with his injured one - Harry knows how pathetic he’s being. It’s winter, he’s supposed to be helping the people of his District. Not fucking it up for all of them. Dumbledore is going to kill Harry, Tom. He doesn’t know what’s happening in the Capitol and anything bad Tom does reflects on him. He doesn’t know anything.

Sibyl tells him. “You’re not useless, you know.”

“What?”

“You were murmuring about how you were useless,” she began to wash his curls. “I don’t think that. Abelene might be hot-headed and opinionated, and Nathaniel might be too caring and protective; but between the three of us, I think they expect too much of you which is why they’re disappointed. You’ve always taken care of us, though, even in the arena.”

Harry turns his head to Sibyl. She was the bluntest out of her older siblings. Perhaps the most observant too. She scrubbed his hair. “From when we first met you, Nathaniel nor Abelene liked you. They thought you were some random kid Sirius had obliged to look after. I think between the three of us, I became friends with you first, but I was a baby back then.” The thirteen year-old held his braid and took it out from its twists. “But you proved yourself to my siblings, and the District. You were friendly and beloved, you are a beacon of trust and communication for all of us.”

“I think the District works ten times better than it once did back in your parents' time.” Tears wielded in his eyes, he didn’t know how to stop them from falling. He always got teary eyed when he was upset, no matter the feeling; angry, frustrated, depressed - and he could never stop himself from crying. Even if he felt empty inside. “Everyone was distrusting before you. They didn’t see how they could use each other for the better. Community was sparked more when the Marauders performed. Back when you played again for the first time since the Games, I don’t think the District has ever been more united.”

“You’ve been through the Hunger Games, Harry, give yourself some credit.” She kissed the back of his head, wrapping her arms around his shaking shoulders. “The District doesn’t expect you to get back up - kicking again. They never expected another victor after Remus. But you persisted. Out of everyone who could’ve been chosen, they’re proud. Very proud of you. Because you are a victor, through and through. Even if you hadn’t won the games.”

“You know how to survive: gathering wood, making specific types of fires, gathering berries, making sure they’re not poisonous to eat, gathering friends—the community to band together and fight the starvation, making sure this winter we were going to be okay? This winter, we won’t starve. This winter, not a single person has become sick yet. You’re medicines, you created with Hermione, the lessons you taught Ginny, and the rest of the kids - they’ve stuck. Your music, it gives us hope.”

“What hope? All I did was sing, Sib.”

She took a deep breath. “Your singing meant you were still fighting - not turning out like Remus. I’m glad for your boyfriend, Harry. He makes you happy and you recover better with him.” She touches the curls that were covering his face. “You are both made for each other.”

She releases him from the hug. “You’re not useless, you never were.”

“Realistically speaking,” Sib takes a cup and washes his hair of the suds, “you’ve done too much for all of us. It was never your responsibility to save us. Never for you to care. That belonged with all the adults but they’re too narrow-thinking. Shallow. But a kid one-upped them, taught them that things were better than they could make it out to be. Trust. That’s what you’ve given us and it’s a tool we can use. You might be here, distraught and doing nothing, but what you’ve already done is enough for the rest of us to take the handles. You, being here, are recovering. Accept that.”

“But Tom—“

“He’s never been in the Games, has he?”

“No, but—“

“He knows how I’m feeling, then, angry. I want to do more, he’s doing more. You light fires in hearts. Hope. That’s what you give us. Your speeches were beautiful, Harry.” She curls the conditioner into his hair. “I hope you know that. What you’ve done is more than enough to allow others to do the work for you. It’s not only you fighting, you never have to do it alone again.” Sib whispers into his ear. “Hopefully, we’ll never see a Hunger Games again."

Harry is washed and clothed, sitting on the couch cuddling with Sib as they watch a random television show he can use to numb his mind as Sirius, Abelene, and Nathaniel stood behind them. Sib was his favourite, Harry thought, she was the underrated one out of the three.

———

Five months flew past and Harry was standing in the forest. He took up archery with his left arm, practising what he could use with his new found ability. His hair was long enough to braid all the way to the back but he thought that once the Quarter Quell came around, he’d cut his hair again. It made his head warm for the winter but knew it was going to be pointless keeping it the length it was. By

himself, he found that jumping from tree to tree was an easier way to practise balance, and strengthening his ankle. It was a good method as the two victors in District 12 prepared themselves for the Quarter Quell. Remus was nerved so Sirius was taking care of him.

Sirius was an asshole, all this considered. He didn't tell any of them where he went or what happened before or after. He kept the whole thing a secret and it was bothersome because Harry was struggling to cope - but what can he say about it? He's a kid, Sirius is an adult. He can make his own choices for himself. Only three people died that winter compared to the twenty-one that died the previous, with the extra bundles of clothes and Harry alive to take care of the sick, he was able to look after those who wanted to live. The three who died were happy to pass.

One was a ninety year-old man, one of the oldest people of District 12, so he had a respectable funeral which most people attend. One was fifty and she was happy to pass on. The last one was twenty, although he had an illness which made it hard for him to live anyway. Harry couldn't kill diseases. Only heal sicknesses.

Nobody knew where he was. He liked attending the forest when he was trapped within his own thoughts and he was becoming comfortable in his own skin, but tonight was the announcement for what the 3rd Quarter Quell was going to be. Harry wanted to be alone with his thoughts. Returning back to District 12 after a swim in the river, a meal with a cooked squirrel, and exercise - his shoulder recovering better than ever, it was close to sunset.

With all the little trinkets he collected from the forest, he returned to Victor's Village. The peacekeepers paid him no mind as he turned up to his house with only a small bundle of things. Harry didn't like his phone no matter how many things Tom tried to communicate with him on it because there was nowhere safe to talk. Harry only texted him occasionally whilst he was content to, no need to text him whilst in a bad mood.

Sib took what he found from the forest. "Oh, pinecones. Thank you."

"I found a necklace too."

"Really?" Abelene went up to the pile of goods.

Harry took his coat off and began to cook dinner. He wanted some soup and figured the girls would want some as well. Nathaniel was off somewhere with his girlfriend. Her name was Zephyr. She was a year

above Nathaniel and a Merchant. Apparently, he was half-seeing her through his games so now after he returned, they wanted to make it official. Sib guessed Nathaniel would be with her for a year whilst Abelene estimated they'll be married. Such gracious guesses. Harry thought depending on how they see fit, they'll be together for a while. They seemed to be a good couple. Zephyr was also very pretty so she was quite desired among many.

He questioned, "would he be with her tonight?"

Abelene shrugs her shoulders. "I'm not sure, the next Quarter Quell is in twenty-six years so we'll be in our mid to late thirties by then and with our own families so perhaps not. He would want to be here with us whilst we're young, you know. She might come over, though, but who knows?"

Sib watched him make the soup. "Sirius is with Remus, presumably?"

"Yeah," she nodded her head. "'Making sure that alcoholic doesn't drink.'"

"Wow… so in character for him, sure they're not just fucking?"

Abelene coughed out her drink she retrieved from the fridge, turning to Harry. He shrugged his shoulders in her direction. "What?" Sib laughed at his comment. He smirked in her direction. "Look, those two have definitely had a fling before—and now they're sorting out their issues. How wonderful? Personally, I think I'm an excellent angel of love."

"Angel of Death," Abelene rolls her eyes.

"Literally."

Eight o'clock was when the announcement was set to be so the girls and Harry snuggled up on the couch with their television on to Nation Hunger Games News. There were clips of him last year fighting against the prisoners before the door abruptly opened. "Has it started yet?" Nathaniel said as he walked in with his girlfriend. "Not yet," he replied.

The two took a seat on the couch. Dumbledore was well dressed when he appeared onto the screen, on the same balcony he saw him on almost twelve months prior. "Ladies and gentlemen, this is the 75th year of the Hunger Games. And it was written in the charter of the Games that every 25 years, there would be a Quarter Quell to keep

fresh for each new generation the memory of those who died in the uprising against the Capitol. Each Quarter Quell is distinguished by Games of a special significance."

Harry clutched Sibyl and Abelene's hands, nervous.

"And now on this, the 75th anniversary of our defeat of the rebellion, we celebrate the 3rd Quarter Quell as a reminder that even the strongest cannot overcome the power of the Capitol." He reads from the card, Harry felt his stomach clenched in fear. "On this, the 3rd Quarter Quell Games, the male and female tributes are to be reaped from the existing pool of victors in each District. If there is no male and female victor from the District capable enough, the normal reaping will proceed."

Nathaniel stands up, frightened, "no—no this cannot happen."

Instantly, Harry gets up from the couch and grabs his jacket. This cannot be happening, this cannot be happening, this cannot happen. "I'm going out, do not find me - do not look for me." Harrys leaves out the back door and leaves for the forest underneath the fence.

He books it, racing towards the trees. He trips over before he makes it to the tree lining and cries where he laid. Screaming in fury, he knew this was going to happen - Dumbledore that fuck. Ever since the Victory Tour, he was quiet. He was manipulating him to have a false sense of security. But no, he knew - even after his mental breakdown, he wasn't done for him. Tom… he didn't know. Kingsley did though, which meant something must be happening behind the scenes. They weren't telling Tom everything; which also meant they suspected him. No.

He sobbed and clawed at his face.

Harry didn't leave the forest for a long time, high-up in the trees as he relaxed with the natural wind that shook the leaves. He was going to have to start training for real. Either Remus was chosen and Harry volunteered or Harry was chosen and Remus volunteered. There was no way that Sirius wasn't discussing the chances of either happening and the best chance they had to win: was Harry, obviously, but it was luck.

But the girl, Harry or Remus would have either a twelve year-old girl to an eighteen year-old girl to look after. He laid on the branch, glancing at his hand glove. It was going to have to be his token. There was no way Harry was going to go into the 75th Annual Hunger

Games without it. He slept and climbed, strengthening himself. He might not be alive before next winter.

But Harry wasn't going to allow another Sedge to happen.

Climbing down the tree, he returned to District 12 with a stern expression on his face. It had been a day since he had seen anyone, wanting to be forgotten about but he knew he couldn't do that to them. He had to return or else they would be killed. Straightening up from the fence and trudging through District 12, the people in the houses around the fence all watched as he walked past them. Harry could tell that they had been alerted of his disappearance and to snitch on him to his family when he returned.

Harry decided that he wasn't going to hide: this was Dumbledore's revenge for his rebelliousness. Child's play, realistically, and he was going to play smart. Tom knew the odds it was Harry, it was high. One out of two. For the girl, it was anyone unless they volunteered which he was thinking about. The volunteering system could be manipulated to give them a victor-like tribute. It didn't have to be a twelve year-old girl. It didn't have to be a thirteen year-old girl like Sibyl. Or a fourteen year-old girl, or a fifteen year-old girl.

Someone strong and capable who could volunteer.

Harry knocked at Hermione's window to her bedroom. The girl immediately answered him and opened it, in shock. "Harry?"

"I'm selfish, I know - but I need to talk to you."

"I saw the announcement," she answered, sternly. "You want me to volunteer - don't you?"

Harry shrugs his shoulders, biting his bottom-lip with tear stained cheeks. "I don't want anyone to go into the Hunger Games but if we're speaking retrospectively, the rebellion is happening. The Head Game Maker is in on the plan, I think. Something is happening and I don't think all of us are going to die. It's just what Dumbledore said… a girl is going to be chosen from our District because we don't have a female victor."

Hermione sighs, understanding. "Yes, I do know that."

"A eighteen year-old tribute is ideal but you're nearly eighteen by July, only two months till September. You are the smartest person I know. Clever, strategically, and ambitious. You understand logic and

if anyone is going to be by my side in the arena, I would think it to be you. Selfish, trust me, I know, but… I don't know who else to ask and would understand me like you. And a volunteer - nobody from District 12 volunteers. You would be new and an exciting thing. Everyone's attention would turn to you."

"And either you or Remus is my tribute partner or volunteer."

"If you do this, I'll convince him not to take my place as a volunteer. I'll do it - and if anything, he will serve solely as the purpose of protecting you. I won't allow him to sponsor me. Not after Sedge, and certainly not after you." Harry takes Hermione's hands into his arms. "I love you like a sister, and I don't want this to happen but - 13 is going to need a genius with credibility."

"District 13 exists?"

"Yes," he gulped. "I'm not telling you any more lies or misdirecting the truth, you deserve to know."

"Tom, right? He's the one to figure it out."

Harry bites his bottom lip, agreeing with her. Hermione hugs him, whispering into his ear. "I'll do it. You don't need to convince me more, I understand." She pulls back from the hug to hold his face. "Abelene and Sibyl would be stupid and try and volunteer themselves. And as much as they'd both be excellent volunteers, Abelene isn't the smartest, and Sibyl isn't the oldest. I can understand why you came to me and if we work together, I reckon we'll both have an fantastic chance at winning. I can honestly see it."

Hermione kisses his scarred cheek. "And if anything, you'll protect me."

"Training," Harry tells her. "You're not going into the arena without training. You'll be eating with us every morning, afternoon, and night. If you're going to do this, you're not going to be malnourished and weak. I'll teach you how to use a knife, wield an axe, and use a bow. At the same time, I'm going to be toughening all three of us up."

"Huh?" Hermione tilts her head. "You mean Remus too."

"That alcoholic is coming whether he wants to or not."

Harry points to the fence's direction. "Tomorrow, I'll meet you in the forest with everything I'll need to begin showing you how to fight,

and with food. Please bring a book you have here on strategy in the arena or something so I can learn too." Harry thinks, "you know how to swim already - all of us have been at the lake before but we should make it an official skill."

Hermione takes his hand. "If I'm in the arena, I'd feel protected by you."

"And we'd have allies, I'd think. Esteven, most likely."

"Really?—Silver's mother."

"She said that she was in-debt to me because of her son's peaceful death," Harry nods at her. "She'd have connections. Viktor Krum might want to team-up as well. He seemed adamant on an alliance as well. They know people, we wouldn't be alone." Hermione seemed all too calm for someone who suggested that she be involved with the Hunger Games but it seemed as if she suspected it to Harry. She murmured to him. "Excellent, what good would my intelligence be used for other than this?"

"Don't think like that, please."

"Harry, it's okay. So long as the District knows we might be sending them to a death sentence."

Harry pointed his finger at them. "District 13—we've got to speak more about it tomorrow. I have thoughts."

Hermione nodded her head, smiling contently. "Okay, tomorrow."

The next morning, Harry dragged Remus with him into the forest. He brought along everything necessary to feed Hermione and Remus (and himself with their leftovers) and all sorts of weapons from his old house, underneath the fence before dawn. Sirius wasn't alerted of what they were doing, revenge, but Nathaniel was. He would be able to keep home-base controlled. Heading into the forest, Hermione had two books with her.

"Good morning, Remus. Harry."

"Hermione—you brought her along with you?" Remus turned to him.

"Hey, I accepted the proposition Harry offered me." The oldest victor

was in the dark about the whole thing. She explained as they went further deep into the forest. “Harry told me that if he or you were to go into the arena, a twelve-year old girl would not be an acceptable ally. Volunteers still work for the girls so I’ll volunteer.”

“No, Hermione.”

“Shut up, old man.” Hermione glared at him. “There is a reason for this decision - which Harry said I could accept or not. I have now shut up and listen. I’m seventeen, turning eighteen in September. I’m younger than Harry who will be turning eighteen at the end of July. Technically, we’re both at the right and prime ages for combat.” She had her long, curly hair into a ponytail. “I’m the smartest person in District 12. If I wasn’t here, I would be at the top academy of whatever the highest type of schooling would be. So, two boxes have been checked off. I’ve been told a mixture of comments about my looks over the years, but most have been positive.”

Harry hands Hermione the torch. “You’re beautiful, ‘Mione. The Capitol would love her,” he turns to Remus.

“An exquisite beauty, I’ll accept.” She states, holding the torch. “Another box is ticked off. How I looked without grim, dirt, and dusk is to be known. Regardless, there is also the strength factor. Now, I’ve never been much of the brawns of any group due to my high intelligence which is why I’m here. I’m going to be training with a strict regime I produce myself over the next two months which would be a long enough time to build muscles and skills with weapons.”

“Who else would you find that is more ideal as a female volunteer than me?”

“No one,” Harry says what they’re all thinking. “Consider her for a minute, Remus.”

“Additionally, I’ll only go into the arena if Harry is with me.”

Remus coughs, stuttering his reply, shocked. “What—no, I promised Sirius—“

Hermione glares at her. “I will only go into the arena if Harry is with me. Think about this. We’re both nearly eighteen. You’re forty-one, Remus. An alcoholic, and unfit. You’re certainly not the smartest between the two of you; and Harry has the highest chances of survival. Between you both, you have already established an dynamic because of the previous year so if he takes you place or you don’t

touch his, everything is fine."

Harry is surprised to hear she thought all of this out already. "You know people in the Capitol. Those are your skill-sets. Besides, if Harry was a mentor, he would be snogging Tom twenty-four seven instead of paying attention to the two of us. And, you and Tom have an already established alliance. You know the other victors. Those are your skill-sets. Now, Harry has none of that but he has fresh experience in the arena. Why else would I want you with me?" She directs the comment at Remus who appears hurt.

"Yeah, Remus." Harry nods. "This plan is the best for all of us."

"Why are you two okay with this? One of you might have to kill the other."

"He knows nothing," Harry tells Hermione.

"Oh, don't you worry. I already knew that."

They make their way to the house on the water, the three setting up camp. It was five o'clock and still no sun rose. Hermione sat on the veranda of the house that stood above the lake. She had her head direction at Remus who sat facing her on the corner of the wood back to the land. Harry sat beside Hermione. "The rebellion," Harry told him, "is soon to hit the Games. The Head Game Maker is working with Tom and the rebels inside of the Capitol to get the allied victors out, perhaps take us to District 13?" He guessed.

Hermione took over after him. "It would be in our best favour to act like we don't know anything about the rebellion and you speak to the Head Game Maker and get an in for our survival, which Tom would be advocating for already. Realistically speaking, inside of the Games all we would be fighting would be the rest of the Careers - since District 1, 2, and 4 have the highest number of tributes who are young and fit."

"You suspect District 13 exists?" Remus questions.

"Yes, I also think that if both of us are in the arena and you're at the Capitol - Ron will protect District 12 by taking the citizens to District 13. Harry points towards where the river flows. "Down that way is the path travellers take when trying to make it to District 13. Rebels, survivors. I've met a group of them before and they stopped here before venturing that way. If anything, we need to start to tell Ron about the plan as well. Maybe, everyone in our close group before we

leave so we're prepared. If anything, Dumbledore hates our District."

"Extendable," Remus says. "They don't need coal."

"Exactly," Hermione nods. "We can be wiped out."

"Is everyone happy with the plan?"

Both Remus and Hermione nod. "Let's get started then."

———

Over the two months before the 3rd Quarter Quell, 75th Annual Hunger Games Reaping — Hermione and Harry diligently trained. They returned each night, sleeping from eight o'clock to waking up at four o'clock so they would get eight hours of sleep whilst eating large meals Molly prepared for them (with the food Harry gave her) and worked out. Hermione was sufficient with a knife, but worked best with an axe. The mobility that it gave her was able to kill a plentiful of trees. Additionally, with her absence through the day, they fed the lie that she was sick beyond belief and that she wouldn't move from bed. Her parents were told that she had a mission to do.

Remus came with them to supervise some days. Harry and Hermione were both gaining strong, tightened muscles, and worked them to their full capacity. They ran for long lengths of time to up their endurance and map the forest out. Additionally, they extended their abilities of being able to swim, swimming across the lake and doing that a lot of times. Additionally, they began to map out the arena beyond the other side of the lake with Remus to track their location with the two phones Tom got for him. Then, they wouldn't get lost.

They found that the duo were able to work well with each other, not only strategically but together whilst fighting. Able to mimic and understand their fighting patterns. Hermione was going to bring a necklace with her into the arena. Harry's. Some people might take it as a 'secret love' sort of thing, but Harry knew what it meant to have it on her. If he died, Tom had it. If he was captured, Tom had it. If Hermione had it, Tom wouldn't be suspected. If everything went to plan, people had a star-crossed lovers pair to recall than Tom and Harry which would be revealed once the 75th Annual Hunger Games is finished, forever.

Their plan was underway.

———

Ron was told a month before the Reaping.

They discussed the possibility of District 12 being disposable and that if he wanted to find District 13 with the citizens of 12 - to take them into the Meadow and disappear into the forest. For Fred and George to find a way to take down the fence without the peacekeepers noticing if that was to come to it. The Weasleys were near the fence, they would be the first ones to it if anything happened. Harry told Nathaniel - and said for the four, including Sirius to move. That he didn't want them anywhere near Victor's Village. Hermione told her parents the same thing. For everyone to start moving slowly towards the houses near the fence.

Plans were beginning to be conducted as Harry and Remus were taken to the stage on the day of the 75th Annual Hunger Games Reaping. Standing tall, unwilling to cry, Harry saw Hermione from the grounds. Molly, Abelene, and Sibyl made her look beautiful. She told her parents two weeks before the Games of the mission she had to undertake and that she'd protect them. She was determined. Harry turned to Remus. "You will not volunteer if I'm chosen, do you understand?"

"Yes," Remus said with hard eyes. "I understand."

"Good - we are surviving this together."

District 12, this was going to be the last time he saw his home. You're on camera, Harry. Bravery. Fleur looked at the two victors sadly, with worrying eyes. She might not like Harry but she appreciated his life. Fleur spoke up into the microphone. "Welcome, welcome. As we celebrate the 75th Anniversary and 3rd Quarter Quell of the Hunger Games."

"As always," she gulped. "Ladies first."

Fleur walked up to the bowl, nervously, she grabbed a slip out and looked at the two victors. Harry and Remus both stared at her content; strongly. Like pillars of hope. She began to announce the name to the crowd. "The female tribute from District 12, Scarlet Longbottom."

Harry's eyes widened at her name being pulled out, searching for Neville's face in the crowd, he shared the look with her older brother. Acting as if he didn't know Hermione was going to volunteer. Then, Hermione began to walk to the aisle between the female and male potential pool of tributes. Standing tall, as Scarlet walked out from the girls side, Hermione exhaled before shouting. "I volunteer as tribute!"

The crowd had mixed reactions - some were authentic, some were lies. They didn't tell everyone so they would have a genuine reaction to her volunteering. Hermione went over to Scarlet, touching both of her cheeks. She was young, fourteen. No fourteen year-old should ever go through the Games. "Go, find Neville, Scar."

"Hermione," she cried, before her older brother came from the boy's side.

"Scarlet!" He shouted and wrapped both of his arms around her. Both of their reactions were genuine. Hermione had a reserved face, nodding at Neville when he looked up at her. She clenched her muscles, showing him briefly what power she had gained over the past two months. The peacekeepers directing her up to the stage, had Fleur murmuring into the microphone. "The first volunteer from District 12!"

Hermione stood at the bottom of the stage before nervously walking up the platform. Fleur touched her shoulder. "What is your name, dear?"

Hermione said her name into the microphone, looking at her parents in the distance who both appeared grief due to instructions from their daughter. She wanted them to understand that this was a choice she made, and that she was doing it for the family. However, Harry felt like their reactions were both genuine as well. "Hermione Granger."

"Well then," Fleur nodded at her. "Now, onto the boys."

Remus and Harry exchanged a glance, not needing to say a word.

Harry will volunteer or be picked. Remus, don't do anything.

Fleur grabs out a slip from the bowl of two. The audience was going wild with excitement, Harry could bet. Tom was nauseous. He knew internally, Harry could bet - that he thought one way or the other, Harry would be picked as the male tribute. And he was right. Fleur brought the slip back to the microphone, "and the man tribute from District 12… Remus Lupin."

Stepping forward, Harry was determined. "I volunteer."

Fleur's eyes widened. "Two volunteers!"

Harry walked over to her, standing opposite from Hermione. Both of them looked to the crowd to find what he didn't expect to see on this

stage again. A two-finger kiss-salute in the air, whistles of the four-song tune ringing out in the crowd. Everyone did it. Neville started it, Harry realised. He breathed in. Fleur states to the microphone. “Harry Potter is the male volunteer for the 75th Annual Hunger Games.”

Then, the peacekeepers came forward and began to drag them away. Harry thrashed - being grabbed like they were. “Hey!” He shouted, glaring at them. “We get to have our three minute meetings before we go—“

“Change of plans, pretty boy.” The peacekeeper told him.

Hermione looked desperately out to the crowd, Harry sorry for her. She screamed. “I love you, mum and dad!” Remus and Fleur followed them, hurriedly, through the hallway. The peacekeepers took them to the train station where they were forced to get on. Hermione shook with tears, Harry hugging her as the two entered behind them. Harry whispered comforting things into her hair, brushing it back as she hugged him back. Scarlet, Harry thought. Neville would join the group. Ron would tell him the plans, protect him, his sister, and parents.

Harry wondered if the musical instruments would survive.

The two moved from the floor to the couch where Fleur and Remus sat around. Remus was two months sober, Harry unclipped his necklace and clipped it onto Hermione’s neck as she wiped her tears away. “I didn’t know it was this hard,” she told him. “You leaving for the first time.”

Harry shrugged his shoulders, narrowing his eyebrows, face upset that he wasn’t allowed to talk to his friends and family for the last time - but he went into the Reaping knowing that might be the case. So did Hermione. Harry relaxed against the couch. “Yeah, it was. And last year was like victors being there as well. Six careers. A few old outlier Districts. It was scary for sure but hopefully this time, there shouldn’t be a problem with gaining attention.”

“Are you going to try and get a low score again?”

“It would suit me, wouldn’t it?”

“And I should get a high training score?”

“Yes,” Harry nodded his head. “That strategy would work the best.”

Fleur tilts her head at the two of them. “Would Tom be joining us again?”

Harry shrugs his shoulders, unsure. He left his phone back at District 12 with the thought it would be destroyed after everything. It wasn’t that he didn’t want to talk to Tom, it was because he knew that regardless of everything - Tom would find him. Harry had previous strategies. Tom had plans.

They’d work it out together - without communications because they understood each other well enough, not to need them. Tom would sneak in again. Francisca, Morgan, Rhodes would be there to assist Harry — Bonavich, Hermione. They had a plan but at least this time, everyone knew about Tom and Harry. There wouldn’t be any need to sneak around. The Avoxes wouldn’t betray them to tell the President about them. Wouldn’t because they weren’t loyal to the Capitol after what they’d done to them.

Harry and Hermione looked at videotapes of the reapings to know who they would be fighting against. Viktor Krum, Millicent Bulstrode, Esteven Graves, Cedric Diggory, and more. Devising plans, they got to work.

Chapter End Notes

And the plot thickens
Up next, "King of My Heart - Miss Americana & The Heartbreak Prince"
P S

King of My Heart - Miss Americana & The Heartbreak Prince

Chapter Summary

WARNING!! discussion of sa (child prostitution) & other heavy topics

There's also underage sex but that's just harry and tom doing their own consensual thing, so *shrugs shoulders*

Chapter Notes

Posted: 1st of May, 2024
Sorrrrry for the missed chapter guys

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry and Hermione got to the Capitol around noon like Harry did the first time. Hermione was amazed to see the architecture of the skyscrapers and buildings as they made their way into the train station. Harry said he was going to smile and wave to the crowd like he was their long-lost love or something. He grinned and it seemed as if the Capitol-citizens were shocked to see his curls all cut before the Games. Hermione's hair was cut to her shoulder blades as well so it wouldn't be a hassle to deal with in the Games - she wanted the most mobility. Still, the single braid was interwoven in his hair.

They screamed for them as Harry blew kisses to them. He ignored the lingering feeling that Dumbledore was watching from somewhere. Stepping out from the train and walking towards the trucks that were going to take them to their stylist stations, he blew a kiss at Hermione - a goodbye for now, and climbed into the truck. He wasn't surprised to find Tom inside, smirking back at him. Once the door shut behind him, he went straight into Tom's arms and began to kiss the life out of him. Tom groaned in his mouth but he wasn't stopping this energy for a moment. Parting, he began to button his shirt, feeling every part of him with his hands. "Liar," he glared at him. "Dumbledore knows - that's why this is happening."

"Mhm," Tom moaned - shutting his eyes tight when Harry dipped his mouth to suck on his neck.

"Fuck, Tom. You've been a bit naughty lately. When are you going to

let me in on your plan?"

"At the Tribute's Centre when I get the chance."

Harry accepted that and unbuttoned Tom's pants, dipping his licked palm into his underwear and palming him. Tom moaned against Harry's lips, Harry using his left hand to manoeuvre Tom's hands so he had them pinned above him. Harry found that from Tom's reactions he was quite skilled with his hands. If he got his way, Tom's hands would be handcuffed and he'd have a blindfold on as Harry showed him his fantasy but, maybe one day in the future when it was safe and they had more than a minute to themselves.

Tom cummed before they got to the open-stadium's backstage, Harry licking the cum from his hands to clean them. Tom glared at the disgusting act, stating his displeasure but Harry couldn't care. He kept making out with Tom until the door opened behind them. "Oh for fuck sakes," he knew that voice from anywhere!

"Morgan!" He grinned cheekily, Tom wiping a spot of cum from his lips with his thumb, but then swiped it onto his ass when he turned around. "Hey," he glared back at his boyfriend, but Tom gave him an expression as if to say 'see, how do you like it now?' "Ass," he replied instead.

"Come on, lovebirds. We've got a show to run."

Harry followed Morgan and Tom went after them after zipping up his fly, buttoning his shirt. Luckily they faced no tributes on their way to his old stylist room. Sarcastically, he hummed. "Ah, it's as if nothing's changed since I've last been here." Morgan rolled her eyes at Rhodes who laughed at the proclamation, and then he began to strip.

Tom coughed when he entered and Harry was nude, standing in the middle of the room as if he owned it. Harry was exasperated when he saw his expression, practically reading his boy's thoughts. "Chill out, Tom." He said. "Everyone here has seen me nude at least a dozen times before… you probably less somehow. Actually, what was my point?"

"Get in the tub," Rhodes pointed, impatiently.

Francisca laughed. "I'm so glad nothing has changed."

Harry pointed at her. "Actually things have changed, you're now a part of the gang, France!"

“Yes, well I’m loving my new job now so come back next year and perhaps I’ll get to keep it for longer.” Harry rolled his eyes, waving his hand down at her, jokingly. She laughed at the action, Harry turning to the bathtub to get in. Tom walked over to him and leant on the ledge of the tub, whispering, “do you think they would mind if I got in with you?”

“Francisca - no, the other two on the other hand…” Harry nodded his head. “Maybe, tonight.”

“I can’t do it tonight, Harry.”

Harry’s eyes widened, blinking.

“Then, tomorrow.”

Tom’s lips shortened before widening at his next comment. “Alright, I can do it tomorrow. And then we can.” A smirk was laced on his face and Harry wanted to consume him so it was attached to his own. Gosh, he was so horny as of late. Perhaps something was in the air or it was just Tom. Tom kissed his forehead and dragged his hand through his hair. “When did you cut your hair?”

“Yesterday. Hermione did hers too.”

“I saw, it was almost down to her backside.”

“Easier to manage in the arena,” he explained. “My hair went down my shoulders to here,” Harry showed him an estimate on his back. “Despite this, the braid stayed,” a smile danced on his face. Tom kissed his scarred cheek, holding it as he examined the heal. Tom spoke about how much improvement it had made since the previous year. Harry was glad he wasn’t perplexed by it.

Francisca began to wash Harry’s hair. She quirked her eyebrow at him. “She was wearing your necklace.”

Harry sighed, frowning. “Yeah, I know. I didn’t want to give it up but… this is coming into the arena with me,” he held up the glove. “And the giving of necklaces is shown as a sign of trust, love, and camaraderie so by giving her mine - something that is important to me, she is seen as my ally.” Tom appears confused by his wording. “Basically, I’m trying to showcase she’s more likely to be my beau than Tom to assist with our act of sorts,” he worded his sentence randomly. Rebellion was the correct term but none of them would agree with it in the room.

“I’ll get it back after the games but a photo of her parents is in there over Tom’s photo so… technically if anything happens, I have a photo to remind myself but it’s the ‘technical cover’ for the situation.” Francisca applauded him over his cleverness but Tom only interrupted him to kiss him senselessly. So much so he was gaining a boner. He shoved Tom from him. “Fuck, I need a cold shower now.” Possessive Tom was as much as a want and need as hell no was.

“The shower is right there.”

“Eh, perhaps.” Harry glared at it, not feeling like the cold water right then and there. The three stylists looked at him before he heightened his voice nervously, voice cracking with a mixture of bemusement and embarrassment. “Could you guys get out for like five minutes whilst I punish this guy?” He gestured his thumb at Tom, inconspicuously. Tom blinked, as if shocked and frightened. He smiled, knowing it wasn’t meeting his eyes. “Thanks.”

Morgan walked to the door and said, sighing, “call us back in once you’re done.”

“‘Kay!”

Francisca had a frown on her face for the first time ever and Harry gasped, not liking the look of it on her. Rhodes found the whole thing ridiculous. Once the door shut behind them, Harry slipped out from the tub and Tom nervously grinned like a prepubescent boy. “You’re going to make this go away in record time, Tom Riddle, or I’m going to kill you.”

Nervously, Tom tilted his head. “Uhm, how?”

“Depends, what would you prefer?—a handjob or a blowjob. Realistically speaking, we have less than five minutes to have sex so realistically it’s between those two choices.” Tom stands up, deciding to take his cock into his hands. Whispering into Harry’s ear, “I’ll learn how to blow you when we have more time,” Harry had an excellent five minutes.

Telling the stylists to return, Tom washed his hand in the bathtub water. Harry sat on the dressing chair with a robe around his waist as he let the stylists do whatever they wanted to him. Waxing, painting his nails, makeup; Tom got ready in the room with him. When he asked about it, Tom told him that he didn’t want to leave like last time so it was the safest bet. Apparently, he told Dumbledore he would arrive from Francisca’s so everything was in order.

Harry was wearing a dark, black patterned shirt that was see-through to his happy trail where he was wearing an onyx pants that had chains wrapping around the lopes. He found it to be hot, with the dark smokey eyes they did on him. His cheek scar was outlined with golden face paint and he wore a small black, cylinder head piece that acted to make his curls stand out more whilst the single braid had a gold thick-chain interwoven into his hair. He looked hot if Tom's wanting expression told him anything. Harry turned his head. "Will I be lit on fire again?"

"Yes," Morgan smirked. "What does your boyfriend think?"

"He's too fine to be let out of his room."

Harry laughs, "ah please. Tomorrow."

He grins, knowing the pissed off reaction was due to his need to have him alone now, but it would have to wait if he couldn't see him until later in the night. Tom was wearing a blood red suit whilst Harry in comparison, looked like a slutty comparison. He hoped Hermione didn't look as slutty as he did or he might have to break up with Tom —he was joking. When Harry saw Hermione, she was beautiful and dazzling, but not his type to break up with Tom with. Nobody was break-up worthy when compared to his man.

Hermione looked gorgeous with her hair out, black crown sitting on top of her head. She wore a dress with two straps that were see-through but the rest of the dress covering everything was all like the material of his pants. She wore his necklace, Bonavich including it into her outfit. He had a basic golden necklace around his neck. Hermione also had the smokey-eye makeup which they compared. But she was nothing like she was at District 12. The Capitol suited her. Stepping on their chariot, Morgan and Bonavich headed over. "Ready for the flames?"

"Of course I am," Harry snickered. "Hermione might not be though."

"Is it real flames?"

Harry sighed. "You saw them last year, yes they're real, but not real real. Only for show. It doesn't hurt, I promise you." She accepts them and says to Harry that if they kill her, at least it's better than the death the Hunger Games might have for her. Harry tells her that's the spirit. Watching the flames engulf their clothes, Harry holds her hand. District 11's tributes take off and they wait ten seconds before they follow after. Hermione was freaking out. "It's alright," he tells her.

“Look confident. These make us look fierce compared to everyone else.”

Appearing before the crowd, he waved to them and told Hermione to do the same. She grinned and upon looking at her side of the screens, she looked magnificent. This was a victor, he knew. They would accept her as one of them before long. Harry lifted their connected hands and the crowd went crazily loud. Hermione laughed at the joy she felt being this beloved. It was enlightening as they crept closer to the stage where Dumbledore was.

For District 12, the cheers were the loudest.

They had double the weapons after all: the 74th Annual Hunger Games Victor and the Volunteer.

He grinned widely, before their hands dropped once their chariot came circling around the bowels of the stadium. Harry noticed Tom next to Dumbledore as they stared at each other before Harry turned his gaze back to Dumbledore. The horses kept taking them back to the beginning where the Capitol-citizens began to chant his name. Hermione was stern beside him, catching Dumbledore and Harry’s exchange of glances. She asked, “he’s him?”

“Yes,” he hissed. “I will kill him one day.”

“I’ll assist you - he looks like a dick.”

“Biggest asshole in all of Panem.”

Returning their chariots back to where they started, he relaxed as the fires diminished. He fed the horses some sugar cubes as Hermione discussed with Morgan how the fire design was created: being the nerd that she was. Harry noticed when Viktor Krum was standing before him. “Hello, Harry. How was your break?”

He shrugged his shoulders with a smile, “I can walk which is nice.”

The horse loved the sugar as he petted its mane. Viktor stood beside him, observing before turning his gaze back over to Harry’s partner. “You know her,” he said. “Did you ask her to volunteer or did she do it of her own accord?”

Harry smirked, “that’s a hard question to ask. It’s Hermione. Why don’t you ask her yourself.”

“I feel as if she’d eat me alive.”

“Hah, her intelligence is unmatched - yes.”

They caught Viktor’s attention and a silent conversation happened between the two of them. As if understanding they were going to be a part of the same plan. Viktor gestured to his costume with interest. “I suppose they put you in this for a reason.” He said, young, desirable, newly appointed victor - why else wouldn’t they? Viktor, however, seemed very concentrated on Hermione, despite the conversation he set up to have with him. His cheeks flushed before he connected the dots.

Harry gestured to Hermione. “Introduce yourself. She’ll trust you if you do.”

“You don’t?”

“Ah,” he swipes his hand. “She’s the brains of the team, don’t let the muscles fool you.”

Harry walked with Victor to Hermione, before showcasing his arm to Viktor before her. Her attention snapped to the two of them and to the victor. “This is Viktor Krum, Hermione.” He turned to Viktor. “Hermione Granger.” His head swivelled back to her. “He wanted me to introduce you to.” Hermione’s cheeks reddened before Morgan slapped a hand to her face.

“Not you too,” and she walked off - bothered.

Harry laughed at her annoyance.

Hermione gave him a glare. “You realise she’s asexual, right?”

“Ah, maybe by now.”

The three tributes conversed for a bit, Viktor and Hermione debating over why his parents named him ‘Viktor’ for a bit before it came to a stop when the horse trainers came to collect the horses and take them back to their stables. Additionally, Viktor’s tribute, Millicent came to grab him and he was mingling too long with Hermione, entirely infatuated. Staring at their interactions, he paused - wondering if Harry and Tom acted this dramatic for each other as he directed Hermione back.

Harry did not have a good night's sleep.

Waking up from another night terror, screaming and clawing at his face because he wanted to get the prisoners away from him - and his personal space, he breathed quickly, trying to calm himself - reminding himself that he wasn't there. Nobody was there to hurt him and that this was all a dream. But it happened. Grabbing his robe, he hung it around his body, and walked upstairs to the roof to find Hermione there. She was gazing out into the distance to the city which was celebrating the anniversary. Hermione turned to him. "Is it always like this?"

"Yes," he agrees. "They're up for hours. It's why most of our things are late in the day."

"Ah." Hermione observes him. "Are you alright?"

"Another night terror."

She quirked her eyebrow, pitiful and nervous. He could understand why. His current state was what she signed herself up for. Her hair was in a bun as she turned back to the commotion. "We're quite the hit; you were right. The whole excitement about us, the 74th Annual Hunger Games Victor and District 12's First Volunteer is exhilarating news to them. Because they don't know us. They know I wear your necklace, I volunteered - knowing you, but they don't know us. It's interesting and certainly more stimulating than being at District 12. And that Viktor Krum…"

Harry smiled when his name was brought up. "You like him?"

Hermione glared at him. "Do not say it like that."

"It's okay if you do, he was quite nervous to talk to you because he didn't want you to dismiss him." Harry leant up against the railing, thinking about his knowledge and memories of the victor. "He's sweet, got Esteven and me all the chocolates I could want after last year's Games. Quite the charmer if you get past his age."

"He's twenty-four."

"Oh, that's a bit old for me."

"Six years… give or take, I don't think anyone is going to care for your age gap if you do pursue him." Harry leant his cheek up against the railing. "You're an adult in September so once you come of age, I

don't see an issue with it. You're maturer than he is now. He seems kind and happy to accept any boundaries you two might have. Hermione, you're quite literally a genius. I don't think anyone is going to question it for a minute. And… if we all live to tell the tale, you'll relate."

Hermione wipes her eyes, "it's unfair - meeting him like this."

Harry understands. "I know. I met Tom only when I returned to the Capitol."

"You thought you might die before you got to do anything with him?" She thinned her lips.

"Pretty much, but he was doing scandalous things behind the scenes to help me out."

"That's wonderful," Hermione curls both pieces of hair behind her ears.

Harry chuckles, looking out to the television screen that was in the distance. "At least you two will have each other in the arena. I'm quite sure that if you guys begin a whole love spectacle inside of the Games, the Capitol will root for the both of you. I'll call you my sister after the whole thing, we can start a whole lie if you really want."

"Thank you Harry, I'll keep it in mind, let's see how the next few days progress first though."

"Good idea."

Harry and Hermione had breakfast together before heading downstairs for the first day of training. They had a whole plan set out for them. They would be together at each event, except unless they really planned on training separate to connect with more possible allies, and knew they would want to discuss plans with Esteven. If anyone would be an ally it would be her and Borgin, another District 3 victor. She was the sole female victor in District 3.

Walking into the training centre, Harry stretched his arms and legs - especially his injured shoulder, making sure nothing he would do would set him back on his progress further. Hermione warmed up because it was beneficial to the body, so the two of them observed the rest of the victors from the mats. They were the strongest and most

agile, their bodies were the most youthful and ready for battles. Trained from the tight muscles all over them.

They first headed over to the berry identification - Harry wanting to show Hermione the system that he found fascinating the last time he was there. She had a crack at the machine and it read back to them 97% out of 100. Harry laughed, nodding at her. “I got 88% which I thought was pretty good. I suppose you spent a lot of time actually writing down the plants, their characteristics, and drawing an example up in the book.”

“Yeah,” Hermione smiled. “This activity is great. I wish we had it back at home.”

Esteven stood behind them. “Good score, Granger.”

Harry turned back to Esteven, smiling softly at her. “How are you, Esteven?”

“Thank you,” Hermione said.

“No problem,” the mother said back to her. “Ah, things could be better but at least we were given two months notice getting back into shape. My children were all fussy about me going back in after last year’s incident so there was that.” Her grey eyes found their way to Harry’s green ones. “I wanted to say, your Victory Tour speech was beautiful - thank you, Harry.”

He felt nervous at that moment. “It wasn’t an issue, press as you know.”

Esteven quirked a knowing smile, apologetic. “Oh, I know.”

Hermione told her, “I think out of all the Games I’ve seen - yours was my favourite.”

“Really?” The woman tilted her head. “What makes you say that?”

“The way you were able to see the wires in the arena to be able to manipulate who died and survived or not was incredibly speculating to observe.” Harry told Esteven that Hermione was a geek for information so that this was normal and that she should get used to it. Esteven was happy to follow them to their next section as she answered all the questions Hermione had about the Games. She seemed to be much happier around them, speaking about her own Games than her son’s. And Harry was happier too.

Borgin was introduced to them and Hermione was having a fantastic time. Being surrounded by intelligent beings who were older and knew a lot of information about things they were passionate about, he decided to leave her there to train on his own. He began to throw knives at the targets and hit most of them. He was still getting used to the prospect of using his left shoulder as his throwing arm rather than his right arm. He was met with the victor of the 73rd Annual Hunger Games: Hero Ferro. Eighteen and gorgeously handsome, Harry hated him.

He hated him because he looked so much like Tom. Dark hair, brown eyes, symmetrical facial structure, and finesse — he was the stereotypical victor. He had darker skin despite the similarities, which fit him as much as lighter skin fit Tom. Although, he wasn't as dark as Hermione who was tan because she had been out in the sun more due to their training.

Hero smirked at him. "Hello, Harry Potter."

"Good to meet you, Hero."

Harry went to grab the knives he threw and Hero watched him eagerly. Handing him the weapons, he left him there, rolling his right shoulder back and forth, trying to massage the phantom pain of it but it wasn't working. Hero seemed surprised at the quick departure Harry took from the section. Blinking, the victor followed him. "I wanted to ask you a question."

Harry found himself at the lighting section, which he didn't need but wanted to confirm quickly for him that he would be able to do it before moving on. He sat down with all the things they would provide for him. Hero sat down after him, Harry observing him. "Ask away then, I'll be most likely focusing on this, though."

Hero seemed very reluctant, considering everything. For such a fierce contender, Harry found himself unmoved by his presence. "I wanted to ask you if you would join us Careers for lunch. With your volunteer girl."

He glared at him. "Her name's Hermione."

"Yes, her."

Quickly lighting the fire with flint and steel - and proving easily he could with only sticks, he stomped out the light with ease. Hero looked up at him, studying him and as if he was judging whether or

not he would be worth making an alliance with. Harry wasn't pleased. "I think unless you're keen on joining our alliance, you wouldn't bother us otherwise."

Walking away from Hero, the teenager was shocked. As if he was sure he'd be able to convince him of joining their alliance. Harry and Hermione had the power, despite his offer. They were young and brilliant. No Careers matched them, perhaps only in experience. Any allies of theirs would be forged by wanting to join them. Hero could if he wanted to but it would depend on where the rebel alliance took them.

Harry had lunch with Hermione, Esteven, Borgin, and a newly introduced Career - Cedric Diggory. He was the Capitol's Sweetheart and if Harry was the Capitol's Angel, Cedric was more adored than him. He had more rumours than Harry had surrounding himself and was quite sexualised for winning the Hunger Games at 14 four years back. Cedric and Hero were the same age, despite the time gap between their wins.

Esteven and Cedric were familiars with each other, apparently, and she wanted to introduce him to the two younger victors. Harry did most of the talking to him though, Hermione was too distracted talking to Borgin about the state of the technological climate. He sighed, fondly, before milking more information from Cedric. Like Hero - he was adoring and handsome, but he was more tanned and sunburnt. Had dimples when he smiled, had the bluest sea-green eyes Harry had ever seen, and was quite literally a mortal version of Poseidon if Harry ever pictured him.

He was unfairly charismatic as well, but he appeared nervous when speaking to Harry.

Why were these more experienced victors seamlessly afraid of him?

He got over the thought quickly but brought it back up to Hermione in the lounge room.

She scoffed, asking him why he was asking that specific question - as if she thought he knew the answer already. He told her he didn't and was genuinely curious. Hermione's brown eyes widened significantly at this piece of information as if it all clicked for her then. "You're fucking terrifying, Harry." She practically shouted at him. "You like to think how you're quite harmless and caring but when you get — that look! That look on your face, you're scary."

Harry's face softened. "I've not been like that all day though, have I?"

She shrugged her shoulders, as if she didn't know how to break it to him. "It's not only that. You were like that at the Victory Tour. On the screen during your Hunger Games. In your interview with Barty Crouch Junior. In multiple interviews. The Opening Ceremony yesterday, for fuck sakes!" She breathed, catching her breath. "District 12 hasn't ever said anything bad about you because we respect you and your intelligence, but also because you're a manipulative little shit and quite terrifying. Hero doesn't have that much intelligence and knows that quite clearly when speaking to you, and Cedric - I heard wanted to speak to you earlier but he couldn't find a moment when you weren't glaring at everything in your facility."

"Oh…" Harry pursed his lips, perplexed. "Really?"

"Yes!"

She crosses her arms, pouting, before continuing. "Those Careers are terrified of you—of us. You made them terrified of us because they realised, perhaps when you stood beside me, gave me your necklace, all those little things, they pieced together that we planned this. That I'm not some girl who volunteered, I'm your friend and you wouldn't let me go through this without a plan in mind. That this whole volunteering thing was a clever deduction of your part, and that really… they don't want to get involved with us. Cedric's girlfriend, Cho, literally stayed at the Career's table because she was intimidated by you."

"They're dating?" Harry questioned, not picking up any of this.

"In secret, for the past year - apparently."

"See, Hermione. They've got a four year age difference."

She rolled her eyes.

"Whatever the case, everyone is terrified of us. You played this game extremely well and I think if you get a zero, somehow in the private sessions, they're going to be even more scared of you." Harry agreed, and said it was a good idea. To which, she pointed out, that was the exact thinking they were scared of - to which, Harry retorted, "you're quite terrifying yourself, genius."

"Oh, thank you. From you, I'll take that as a compliment."

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It was eight o'clock when the door opened and Harry snapped his head to see it was Tom, jumping from the couch as Tom followed forward to him like he was doing - they met in the middle. Hermione was in the middle of watching a soap opera, crying, before glaring at the two of them who began to kiss in the open space. "If you guys are going to do that, I'll kick you out." Harry departed from Tom puffed.

"Tom," he told his boyfriend. "I'd like you to meet Hermione Granger. Hermione, Tom Riddle."

Hermione wiped her tears away as she sat up straight, Tom taking her hand and shaking it. She watched the two of them with keen eyes. Harry latched himself to Tom immediately, not letting go. Tom told her it was lovely to meet her after hearing a plentiful of stories from Harry and she was bashful before snapped out of it, stating the same thing - and how it was a pleasure. Despite this, Tom requested that she wouldn't mind if he kidnapped him from her for a night and to which, they departed back to their room, Hermione accepting the statement. Although, she told Harry, teasingly, that it was very romantic and crushing behaviour—the two of them, to which he told her to fuck the hell off.

Harry had Tom on his knees for him, being the sex expert that he was, guiding him through the steps and techniques of a blowjob. Unfortunately and pleasantly, Tom wasn't bad at anything. Harry had a godly scene, watching a blissed and malleable Tom trying his hardest to please him.

Harry cooed, ruining his perfect-looking hair to pull on it softly, adding more pressure.

His boy seemed to like that and afterwards, once he cummed, Harry returned the favour - showing him how he would've gone about it but that Tom did a wonderful job for a first-timer. He held the side bones of his hips, gently pressing into the skin above with his thumbs. Tom whimpered at the feeling - knowing Harry goes crazy over it as well, happy to teach him all his fun tricks. He bobbed his head and Tom yanked hard at his hair which he liked. Harry didn't even think Tom noticed he was doing it, but it was fine by him.

He sucked at the underskin of his cock and the girth was a sensible and fulfilling size for his mouth, able to take all of him with practice and experience. He didn't gag, humming around his cock - knowing

and watching as the vibrations drove him crazy. Being the sexually inexperienced teenager that Tom was, it sent him over the edge and he was panting like crazy. Harry smiled around his cock and swallowed his entire load, liking everything about Tom. Even if he wouldn't ingest cum, Harry would be happy to do it for the both of them.

Harry hugged Tom and the two of them laid nude on the bed together.

Tom began to draw patterns on his chest, Harry stroking his hair with his right hand. "The rebellion," Harry began, "is all about to start with the Games, isn't it?"

"The bread. The sponsorships we sent tells you the day and the hour based on the amount. Twenty-four should mean midnight. The amount of times, the day it's happening on." Tom agrees, "after a lot of conversation with the Head Game Maker and hiding from Dumbledore and planning - we've come to the agreement that this is the best way to begin the Rebellion and protect you."

"And Hermione," he told him. "She put her life on the line for this."

"Okay—Hermione too. I'll agree with that."

Tom had dark circles underneath his eyes. Harry touched them, noticing how 'imperfect' he was seeming lately. Stress was causing him to age, lips less pump and tear lines redder than usual. Harry kissed his nose and caressed his backside and back with his hands. "You've been safe, correct?" Tom hums, tiredly. "What about we talk more in the morning and have a fun bath before we get back to work?" At that, Tom's eyes lit up and he went to sleep on the premise that a good morning would overcome them both.

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They woke up around eight which was good since they were asleep around ten. Harry moaned against Tom's touch, the controlling aspect of Tom's sexual preferences coming out in full force. He was stretched out for the morning and he had good wet-dream material for a long time. Hermione pointed at all the hickeys on his jaw, neck, and Adam's apple. Harry shrugged his shoulders. "Let them think, just 'cause I'm getting good sex."

Hermione turned red and they walked out with breakfast in their hands.

Standing in the training centre, all eyes were on him, as he grinned widely.

Hermione was sighing, unimpressed beside him.

Esteven laughed her way over, “who mauled your neck - Potter?”

Acting, Harry sighed, pouting. “Mosquitoes, those little shitty insects. I swear, I hope I didn’t contract some sexual disease.”

It was a good beginning to his morning as Tom left to do more rebel planning. More Careers spoke to him over the next few hours as he trained. Cho Chang was impressed by the display on his neck and he shrugged, saying he was a clumsy man, and she laughed at the comment. Millicent threw axes with him and commented on his win the previous year, and his speech, Harry thanking her for her kind words. Spoke about how Susan was probably his most formidable opponent in the arena. She was all pleased with his words - but said that the Capitol would grow jealous the longer the mosquitoes bites stayed. He shrugged his shoulders, scratching at his neck nervously. “The mosquitoes are vicious, perhaps it’ll protect them too.”

Millicent rolled her eyes.

District 1’s victor was the youngest woman, Gleam Vestis, who won seven years prior and was twenty-four. She was white like a ghost unlike her male counterpart and had blonde flowing hair. She was beautiful and goddess-like, the woman dazzling and the stereotypical female Career from District 1. She watched him at archery. “You have quite the form there,” she murmurs. “Left-handed too. How long did it take you to learn?”

“Six months, but I’ve been learning on and off for years.” Harry tells her.

Her blue eyes widened. “Really? Now that is skill.”

Harry sighed, “I was a lot better with my right arm, though, but it’s a bit fucked.”

“Shoulder wound, yes?—I understand, my sister did her shoulder in when she was a kid. Had to learn everything backwards on her other arm. It was a pain to see but she pushed through it.” Gleam’s lips were like the colour of raspberries, Harry noted, perfection - fitting the Capitol’s absurd beauty standards. Gleam took the bow and arrow from him. “I learnt archery when I was five. My father taught me

before he passed. My mother was all about cooking and wanted us girls to learn but I was stubborn, my sister was too smart for being a housewife, and my younger sister - the one who did her shoulder, actually liked it so she did. I won my Games with a bow."

Harry found it impressive. "Formidable," he commented. "I'm sorry for Alistar and Persephone."

"Don't you worry about them," Gleam told him. "They would understand."

The tributes weren't brought up again.

Gleam taught him different methods of shooting that would make his arm more comfortable and she began to tell him about her district partner, Lord. About how their alliance was able to help her win the Games in the end but she had to fight up in the high trees with her supply until she was the last person standing. Harry found her story admirable. Hero pouted when he trudged over to the two of them, complaining to Gleam that she was stealing all the training time with Harry. She said he could have him if he wanted but Harry couldn't care - saying he was learning from her.

Hero wanted to see what he could so Harry judged perhaps he should show him. Show off what he was capable of, even if he was disabled in some ways than others. He hit all the targets in less than a minute, left-handed. Mind you, Gleam could do it in twenty seconds with her dominant hand, but he found his score still impressive. Hero blinked at him, pursing his lips. "Okay, you're happy here so I'm going to head to lunch if you'd like to join."

The woman gave Harry her bow and arrow. "Join us if you'd like, Harry. There is room for us all."

The others in the room began to exit.

He practised for another thirty minutes before entering the lunch room to find all of them eating together at the same table. It was complex to see but they welcomed him over and he sat next to Hermione. She was enjoying all the attention she got from Esteven, Borgin, and the other clever victors around the table. Victor was sitting opposite to Harry, and he rose an eyebrow at her before nodding his head at him. The victor was pleased with himself because he was making progress with her. Harry said nothing about it and ate, conversing with all of them.

Harry had a conversation with District 10's victors, Emmeline Vance who won nine years prior, and Newt Scamandar who won thirteen years prior. They spoke about how they enjoyed his speech about their two tributes and not to let the pressure get to him. Out of everyone who spoke to him, Hero was the most perplexed he found. The eighteen year-old wanted to speak to him — because Harry observed that he wanted a friend rather than an ally which was incredibly odd. Hermione debated it was because he was new to the whole thing like Hero so he would understand, he didn't.

Before he left the training centre for the day, he confronted Gleam about his behaviour. She pursed her lips, narrowing her eyebrows at him. "This," she gestures, "is what he's frightened about — do you know what happens to the desirable victors, Harry?"

He shakes his head. "Let's come back to our floor and we shall discuss it."

Hermione was allowed to be brought along and the two of them sat on District 1's couch. Hero was nowhere to be found, still downstairs, but despite how close they were to the ground level, nothing much about the living quarters was anything different to District 12's penthouses besides they have the roof. Gleam begins to explain the horrors that are in the life of a victor. "President Dumbledore is an infuriating man, and we - victors - are his property. When I won my Games seven years ago, I had him visit my house afterwards and told me that he would either proposition me to the citizens of the Capitol or murder my family, leaving me alone after the Games."

Hermione gasped and Harry's grip on the couch got stronger. "It's the fate of all the pretty and desirable victors. I know that even your District 12 victor had the same fate deplored over him. Remus Lupin declined and ended his family's lives, not knowing what chaos he would bring. He was the first amongst the rest of us. Every time a new Hunger Games comes around, the victors who are seen as desirable are caught up having to please the rich of the Capitol."

"Last year, being Hero's first year, he was met with the same fate - and Harry, you would've been too if not for this." She gestures to the 'Games.' Hermione and Harry were horrified. "Hero isn't handling the prospect of it well, only being told how to fight since he was young. We were in the same academy together, I was one of the strongest and most talented - so I was picked for the 67th Annual Hunger Games - and kept teaching there once I'd won. He was eleven. Then, his Games came around and he felt like he was at the top of the world before he

realised the life that came after being a tribute in the Games. A life as a victor."

"That's horrible," Hermione knitted her eyebrows together. "How did you cope?"

Gleam glared at her before Harry spoke up, "sorry about that—Hermione's quite insensitive."

"It's fine," she closes her eyes together, "you don't think - you do. That's what I told Hero and I think he's sort of glad he chose to be this year's victor. It means he doesn't have to do it this year or never again, if he dies. Hero, unlike me, is a soft child still. He's never put relationship before his training, never lived before he was forced to survive and endure another torture. Relationships are quite literally over for him because he can't differentiate those memories from good ones."

"I'm guessing he tried to have a relationship once he returned from the Games?" Harry presumed.

"Yes, with a girl called Rise, except he had a mental breakdown during the whole thing - and Rise took him to me. I'm quite literally like an older sister to him. His mother always works and never puts any time into him, his father wastes away drinking, and his younger brother had to see all of this happen. Rise was a childhood friend of his and I know that he likes her as much as she likes him - but he can't touch her or himself without thinking about what's been done to him." This was not a fate Harry wanted for him. Hero. Hermione turned her head to him and nodded hers persistently. They might not be allies, and he might die but - he will be put onto the list, and so will Gleam. They deserve to be. All the victors did, but they (she) was honest - and Harry respects the amount of trust they (Gleam) had to have to tell them that, even when they weren't allies.

Chapter End Notes

sorry for the miss on Sunday, I was busy & tired
I'm not sure if imma do a double drop at some point to make up for the chapter but who knows? I might just extend the final release back. Thanks for all the hits and kudos guys

Up next, "Dancing With Our Hands Tied - The Tortured Poets Department"
I love Hero's character & Gleam's

P S

Dancing With Our Hands Tied & The Tortured Poets Department

Chapter Summary

The exam thingy

Chapter Notes

Posted: 5th of May, 2024
Happy May everyone

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tom returned that night and Harry only slept with him, he didn't feel like having sex after hearing Gleam's retellings of what a life of a victor is like. Harry was beginning to understand their plan, and Tom was surprised to hear that he wanted to add Gleam, Hero, Victor, and Millicent to the list of people to save once they exited the arena. Harry was persistent on the matter and woke up the next day, exhausted. He had a shower which Tom joined him for - and he made out with him before dressing ready for breakfast and the day. Tom wouldn't be back until the following evening where he planned something special for Harry so for him to be ready for it. Harry accepted it and left to head with Hermione downstairs.

Upon arriving, being the last ones there, they trained. Harry did arm strengthening training where, even with his brace, was unable to do pull ups. With his left arm, he could, but not with all the damaged veins in his arm. Sitting on top of the monkey bars, he observed everyone as Hermione did her pull ups from besides her. Harry watched as Hero trailed over to the two of them. He began, with his forehead wrinkled - which was a completely innocent tell sign that he was anxious. Harry listened to what he had to say. "I heard Gleam told you everything."

"Yes," Harry agreed. "We didn't know."

"I think everyone figured that out when you were unbashful yesterday."

"Ah, that's what all the commotion was about then. You were worried I was being pursued even whilst in the Games - no, I'm not." Hero looked up to where he sat and nervously asked - in more words than

necessary, why was he being sexual with a Capitol member. Harry shrugged his shoulders. “He’s my boyfriend so… I like him like that, I guess and this is the only time where I’ve gotten to see him in the past eight months.”

Hero was red and his cheeks were round with a child-like curiosity. Harry’s attention turned back to Hermione, who looked up at him. “Would you like to meet him?”

It went unsaid, the 'yes', even as he nodded his head.

Harry spoke with District 7’s victors, Ilex and Atwood; who won eight and eleven years ago. Through brief discussions with them about their District, he confirmed the uprisings were happening there like District 10’s District and that if they were to make allies with any of them — it would the rebelling Districts, even if the rebels could save the Career tributes after they had gotten to a certain point in the Games. Ilex, Atwood, Emmeline, Newt, Cedric, Cho, Esteven, and Borgin all became their chosen allies. Not knowing how many were going to survive or not, the big number was there in case anything happened to any of them — but even with this chosen amount, District’s 3, 4, 7, and 10; they could all die to unheard of circumstances.

Hermione smiled at him — telling him she felt safer with the strong alliance they were making. “If anything,” Harry told her, “Remus and Tom were working together to let them in on the rebellion plan ever so slowly. Viktor Krum,” they’ve accepted as foe now, “is going to be the only victor in the Career pack, knowing of the plan. If he keeps them - the Careers alive until the third day, they should be fine.”

“That’s good,” his friend smiles. “So what are you going to do about Hero?”

“I’m not sure yet - he’s an unknown case.”

Hermione begins to climb up the rope, trying to do so in record time. Harry followed after her the two relaxing on top of the attached rope. “I feel quite sad about him, but I don’t want him to die either.” Hermione told him. Harry knitted his eyebrows, responding. “He’s going to need a lot of therapy 13 might be able to provide. I at least want him to have a chance at a good life even if he can’t fight in the war. It would be the safest place for him.”

“I think so too.”

Returning with Hero to their floor, the teenager takes a seat on the

couch. Harry goes to make himself a salad, and brings back dips and breads for the teens to snack on whilst they wait for Tom. They turned on a stupid rom-com and cringed at all the disgusting - infuriating bits, the trio laughing about how it was stupid, and unnecessary. It wasn't until the door opened when Harry's shoulders finally relaxed after a hard day, doing whatever he was doing whilst he was training. Tom was dressed fancily in a suit and Hero blinked at him, Tom pursing his lips in confusion at the teenager standing before them. Harry gestured his arm to Hero. "This is Hero Ferro, I wanted to introduce you to him."

"Harry," Hero whispered. "That's Tom Riddle."

Hermione snickered, "you'll get used to it, Hero."

"What?" He shrieked, holding his shoulder. "That's the President's successor, you know."

Tom rolled his eyes sassily and shrugged his shoulders, "I think everyone knows that. Quite literally more now since Harry made his comment this time around last year. Now," he turned all his attention to Harry - said teenager, grinning back at him, whilst Hero watched the interaction in confusion. "I want to take you to the roof. If you would, Hermione." She does a thumbs-up at him and drags Harry back to his room. Hero follows out of curiosity and with the burning fear - not wanting to be alone with a Capitol-citizen.

"Why are you guys so calm?" He asks, "that's Tom Riddle."

"And my boyfriend for the past year."

Hero blinks, scared. "Aren't you afraid—"

Hermione shakes her head. "Hero, trust me when I say, they're made for each other." Hero wants to object but she begins to explain their dynamic more. "Harry and Tom are perfect for each other. They've known each other much longer than the past year so it's not as if they've gotten instantly together, on that note, it's not as if they haven't hung out at all in the past year either. Tom came to District 12 after the Hunger Games for a month to hang out with Harry. It was adorable, you should've seen him when you were singing."

"Oh, 'Mione, I know - I saw."

"You can sing?"

“Quite well.”

She rolls her eyes at his generous statement. Hermione, like the compulsive speaker that she is, continues on with her observations of the two. “Tom protected Harry after his Games, and even gave Harry a phone - which he doesn’t even like using, to communicate with him. I mean - Tom even got over his disgust for the outback for Harry. If you’d know anything about Capitol-citizens is that they don’t like getting dirty but we had a mud fight once, and Tom was covered in mud.”

Harry pointed a finger at her. “The twins were destroyed for once.”

Hermione grinned at him, excitedly. “I know - exactly why I wanted to bring it up.”

Hero watched them go back and forth, Hermione changing Harry into a simple suit. He looked at himself in the mirror and smiled at what he saw looking back at him. She tucked his collar in and smiled, “you look wonderful, now…” she began to drag him over towards the door, “you’re beau is waiting for you.”

As if Hero connected the dots, he exclaimed. “That’s who you were talking about.”

“Yes, you’re catching up.” Harry sniggers.

Harry walked with Hermione to the stairs and headed upstairs to the roof. She didn’t follow after him and he asked why, but she said to go with his gut feeling. Nervous, and surprised at the candles that were decorated in the gardens above, lighting up the Tribute’s Centre, he stepped towards where they were leading him to. Noticing a red carpet of sorts, he shook his head, bemused at the efforts Tom was willing to take them to. Stepping and following the carpet, he found that Tom was standing at a gorgeously decorated table - presumably creating a night for them to have a luxurious dinner together. He sighed before a smile blossomed on his face. He really did love his dork, taking a seat at the table - Tom, the other side.

Harry smirked. “How long have you been planning this?”

“Ever since I couldn’t see you after the Victory Tour - Dumbledore banned me.”

“Ah,” he understood. “How special.”

Tom rolled his eyes and they ate together, the fine dinner the Avoxes created for them. Harry thanked them as they poured his water. Tom said nothing about the kindness he was giving them but knew it was the best he was going to get out of his boyfriend. The two spoke a lot about the varying conversations: politics, how things were going with the rebels, Neuro, Francisca, Dumbledore, spanning from dangerous to mild topics. It wasn't until the two went to check out the view the building gave them of the Capitol when Tom kneeled down on one knee.

Harry didn't even notice him do it at first before turning his head to hear Tom speaking to him, from lower than he previously was - next to his ear. "Harry James Potter," he heard him begin, Harry pausing - observing the ring that was before him. "Will you bestow me the honours of marrying you?"

He laughed, but he felt his cheeks wet with overwhelming joy, "isn't the term - will you marry me?"

Tom grumbles, with a nervous smile, "as if that's any more delicate."

"The answer is yes, Tom, but I think you already knew that though." Tom stepped up from where he stood on the ground and Harry pressed their lips together. He didn't think much about the two of them being engaged but he found he was relieved. Out of the two of them, he always knew Tom would have to do the honours since Harry was ready to do whatever with him, but Tom had more boundaries about where their relationship was progressing so — the honours.

The kiss was magical; as if a lingering power was between them. The ring was lovely.

It was a square-cut ruby in a golden band. It was placed on his right hand underneath his brace where Tom told him to sneak it in with him to the arena, so he had something to connect them. Additionally, he told him that he lost it here, he had another copy so he would always have the same connection. It was a beautiful gemstone that made Harry cry. He almost wished their parents were there to see this moment but they weren't, and it was hard to accept. Tom kissed his worries away, presenting him his own ring that was already in his hand. It was an emerald diamond with a silver band. "Opposites attract," he told him. "Dumbledore will understand that soon enough."

"Oh you dork," he pressed his hands to his cheeks and kissed him passionately.

The two began to leave the rooftop with their hands intertwined, Hermione cheering from where she caught the whole thing on camera with his phone. She shrieked with happiness and Harry cried into her arms, the two talking about the arrangement together - Tom telling Hermione earlier that he was wanting to propose to Harry and if he had her permission to: neither having parents to be able to initiate the process with. Hermione and Remus were both accepting, and wanting to be there for it, but Remus had rebellion duties. The whole thing made him cry harder. He was such a baby, as he stood there, wiping his tears. “We’re going to be married,” Harry grins at Tom. “We should have our wedding after the Games.”

“Yes,” Tom sighs, “as if we would have them in.”

Harry laughed, Hermione hugging him again. “I’m so happy for you both.”

Hero, nervously stood there as if he didn’t know what to do, Harry turned his head to him and he opened his arms, gesturing to him to come join the hug. Hermione waved her hand at him and reluctantly, he wrapped his arms around the two. Hero’s head was leant on Harry’s shoulder, Harry’s cheeks hurting with the amount he was grinning. “Okay, well Tom and I are going to have some downtime,” he broke apart from the two. “I’ll see you guys tomorrow.”

“Hermione,” he tells her, “I’d like to see the video before we leave for the training centre, m’kay?”

“Alright, Harry.”

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Harry and Tom went multiple rounds that night, switching who was doing all the work, depending on how they felt after the previous round. Harry carted his hand through Tom’s hair, kissing his cheek, and jaw, and neck - but he was too exhausted to do anything more. Tom’s sexual endurance was getting longer the more he spent time around Harry. Littered in bruises, he was content with the show that was on his neck. His lips were bruised and on his chest he was bleeding with a few small bite marks that littered him. He found he didn’t mind it when Tom bit a little too hard, but he minded it when it happened to himself. Instead, Harry licked him which Tom groaned at in delight.

He asked. “How long had you been planning that for?”

“Quite a while… although, I thought if we were going to be together forever, why wait now.”

“True point,” Harry kissed his forehead. “And with the war, better now than never.”

Tom’s eyes narrowed at the comment, wrapping both arms around him possessively. “This war isn’t going to get in-between us, Harry. You’re going to survive, I’m going to survive - we’ll be able to live soundly, safely somewhere when this is all over.” With one hand, he lifted his cheek. “We’ll get married at 13 or 12 or wherever we want our wedding, we’ll live in all the Districts or travel the rest of the world if you like - exploring what is out there, we will live freely. We just have a few bumps in the road to get through first.” Tom appeared desperate to get this through his head. He smiled, understandingly. “I love you, Harry. I want you to be okay - and I will do anything for you.”

Harry pressed their lips together, parting. “I know, and I appreciate it Tom.”

He whispered into his ear. “I’d do the same thing too, I hope you know.”

“I know - fuck, of course I know Harry.” Tom kissed the corner of his lips. “You are amazing, and I’m so lucky to become your fiancé.” And for the first time — and if not, then in a long time, Harry saw Tom cry. He was vulnerable and weepy, and exhausted.

Harry wiped his tears and let him cry, pressing kisses across his forehead, cheeks, and nose. It bemused Tom, but his eyes appeared so tired. Drained of all emotions, accepting the love Harry had to offer like he was amazed he was still receiving it. Harry adored Tom, and knew they did have codependency issues: knowing they both were better when together, and were drowned in grief when they weren’t - but they didn’t have the luxuries like the Capitol. They were made for war. Child soldiers in both their roles, for the enemies.

This life was suffocating them - and they had only each other to turn to, who understood. From childhood to young adulthood, to adulthood; they understood and breathed in each other’s truths. Their imperfections, their flaws, their mistakes, and fulfilled the opposite whilst the other protected their own issues. They were made for each other in the same way they were built to empathise and fight together better than anyone else.

Harry knew the feeling; pure joy, of being able to be called someone's fiancé — and for Tom to be his in marriage and name. Whether they share a last name or they split their names together. Tom Potter-Riddle. Tom Riddle-Potter. Tom Potter—no, absolutely not. Harry Riddle? That doesn't sound as bad. Harry Potter-Riddle. Harry Riddle-Potter… they would have to decide what they'd like to call themselves when the day came to do so.

Harry slept the best he had in forever.

Tom was on his chest when he woke up, Harry stroking his hair as his boy slept heavily. He kissed his forehead and slipped out from the bed to shower and brush his teeth, kissing Tom's cheek when he dressed and entered the living room where Hermione, Remus, and Fleur were all sitting around the table. Hermione shot up when she saw him. "How does it feel to be engaged?"

"Liberating," he says, giddy. "I think Tom was more surprised than me if I'm going to be totally honest."

She hugged him and Harry pressed his hand to her back, swinging her side-to-side, overjoyed. Taking off his brace from his hand, he showed everyone the ring got for him. Hermione cooes, "that's so beautiful." Remus tells him a fantastic job on the catch, and Fleur cries and admits she didn't think she'd get to see this day come. Hermione pulled out the video clip and at the beginning, all you could hear was her and Hero bickering about the whole fiasco of the situation. "Shut up, Hero." She told him. "These two are made for each other. This is literally their moment." "He's the President's successor—this is dangerous."

"As if that's changed anything about the situation, we know!" She shushes him. "Now shut up."

The video was on Harry and he watched himself not even notice Tom bending down on one knee before he realised, Tom saying his line, and the two bickering over it before accepting. Hermione told him that Nathaniel had the video on a phone he had back at the house and was sharing it around with all their friends and family. Hermione was amazed, showing him all the replies that were coming through from their different friends.

'AHHH—the day finally happened! Congratulations, Harry — Ginny'

'My best mate is getting married, can I be the man of honour? —Ron'

‘Yes,’ Harry responded back.

‘Ah this is amazing — Molly’

‘Good lad, Tom, I accept this marriage — Arthur’

‘Glad,’ he types back.

‘Everyone is going crazy at the news Harry! Congratulations — Charlie’

‘This means Tom’s a part of the family now, doesn’t it? — Fred’

‘Prank wars! — George’

‘Thanks George & Fred but realistically, wasn’t he already a part of the family when he joined us for the mud fight? Thank you Charlie.’

‘Congratulations, Harry, on this endeavour — Percy’

‘Glad to hear it, Perce’

It went on like that until he told them he had to leave and that he would talk to them later. Nathaniel told Harry that he was proud of him and Tom: Abelene said that she would like to be a flower girl with Sibyl: and Harry told them it would suit them well. Although, he bet Tom was organising a fantasy wedding in his head so they would have to discuss all the details before they came to the conclusion of the final touches of the wedding plans. It would be good morale for him in the Games. He ate breakfast and left alongside Hermione.

Although he was distracted, he wouldn’t stop looking at the direction of the wedding band on his finger that was covered up, and kept fiddling with his brace. Gleam came up to him with a fond smile, “congratulations are in order — I heard.”

“Yes,” he smiled back.

“The mosquitoes seemed to go wild last night,” Esteven wiggled her eyebrows, cheekily.

He didn’t say anything but only showed her the ring, the District 3 victor widening her eyes before he tucked it back underneath the brace. She fisted bumped his good shoulder and nodded at Gleam. “Yes, congratulations are in order.” He flushes and he goes back to train. Harry and Hermione trained for the rest of the day and Harry didn’t think anything could make his mood foul. Fleur booked Harry

and Hermione a massage so they got their muscles popped back into place and removed all the tension from all the past few weeks of training.

Afterwards, he was in his fluffy robe, sitting on the couch with Hermione - enjoying the cocktails they provided. He was almost eighteen; hopefully he would be awake for his birthday this year. Fleur joined them and they clicked their glasses together before drinking the contents. The trio watched multiple movies and ate dinner together. Remus was out on business. The next day, they went back to training. Victor was hanging out with Hermione more whilst Harry practised with an axe. He found himself distracted; so deeply focused in his work that he didn't notice Cedric who was standing there. "Oh," Harry smiled at him. "Hello."

"Harry," Cedric nodded his head at him, softly smiling. "I was wondering if I could talk to you."

"Sure."

The two of them headed over towards the berry identification station. Harry listened to what he had to say. "I've been told by my mentor that you've accepted our request for an alliance." Harry began to do the activity so it didn't look inconspicuous that they were talking together, he told Cedric. "Our alliance, you mean. Hermione and I have taken into consideration who we want on our side which consists of District 3, 4, 7, and 10. You may join us but it means you won't be a part of the Careers this year."

Cedric turns his gaze away from him. "Cho doesn't know whether to partner-up with you. She thinks that we have the best chance of winning with the Careers."

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "It's up to you but I'd personally pick soon. Our Districts are allies, not only in the arena but out. If you want the ultimate protection - you'd be most protected with us." Cedric told him he would consider it and left to go to speak to Cho. Harry got a score of 93% out of 100. Hermione hummed behind him. "Not bad."

"Our alliance has begun. How's Victor?"

"Alright," she says sadly. "He knows."

He didn't say anything moving on. Hermione followed him and together, they put in the work they were at the Hunger Games for. By

the end of the work out, walking to lunch, he felt strong. Hermione sat next to him and beside Harry, Hero took the spare spot. “I hope this isn’t taken.” Harry tells him it's free and they sit down together. Ilex took a seat next to Hermione, talking about the varying trees in District 7. Hero is shown the ring and he’s perplexed by the entire situation with Tom and him. “Does he treat you kindly?”

He nods. “Yes.”

“I suppose that is good then.”

“Tom would legitimately die before he started treating me poorly.” Harry told him, tucking the ring away. “Or I would tell him if he was. I don’t play when it comes to my happiness.” Hero nervously glances away from him. He could tell that he had perplexed feelings over the whole thing. Harry was glad Hero was on the list to protect if he was still alive by the time the escape occurred. That night, Harry had a bath - knowing Tom was going to appear sometime the next morning before he did his private session. He had an ingenious idea.

Since he was trying to get nothing, he thought that if he began to sleep on the floor, he would gain nothing because he did nothing impressive. Hermione, the perfectionist - and despite their plan, was going to try and get the highest score that she could. He went onto his bed and rewatched the proposal video, giddy, reading the other texts his friends had sent throughout the day. Fred and George recorded a video of the two of them in the lake, trying to drown each other, whilst Molly cooked on the same bench that Harry and Tom fucked on previously - causing him to blush, but he wasn’t about to tell them, and the Weasleys mapping out District 12’s forest incase they had to hid in it.

Fred and George were going to explore the forest and create a map, trying to find District 13 so it was easier to run off too. Additionally, they began to stock up the house of medicines and necessities in case they didn’t have any when District 12 was somehow attacked. They didn’t know what the Capitol was going to do once they were broken out of the arena. Ginny spent less time at school like Luna, Neville, Ron, Abelene, Sibyl and Scarlet. The Marauders began to move their instruments slowly to the house. It was becoming a project of sorts for the District, rumouring flying around of what could happen and to be prepared for it.

Sirius was extremely happy for the engagement.

Nathaniel didn't work in the mines, he took up a job with the Merchants - lying technically so he could hide out in the woods with Abelene, Sibyl, and Sirius; beginning to create little shelters for people to hide in if they were bombed. Little children were snuck out of District 12 too; the ones they could claim were dead. The head peacekeeper didn't do anything because he was from District 2 and understood they were only trying to do what it took to survive, if anything, Harry was beginning to think he might betray the Capitol and help the citizens of District 12.

Harry sunbathed on the roof, the morning of the private sessions. Hermione watched him, reading and eating grapes on her towel. The Avoxes were pleasant in making them charcuterie boards to eat from and Harry felt like royalty with his brace off and ring on his finger. He was only in his underwear as he tanned his skin. Neither spoke, but the Marauders played on the record player Tom brought to the Tribute's Centre. He had a lot of other copies of the songs he had created once he left the Capitol, so even if one copy was damaged there were ones. Tom didn't want the songs to die - and Harry was quite sure there were some on the aircraft to District 13.

Hermione was enjoying herself wonderfully. "Gosh, these books are divine."

"I know right," his eyes were closed. "The education is wonderful."

"Tom better bring books on the aircraft."

He smiled at the comment, reminiscing how it was such a Hermione thing to say. He felt his skin sizzle underneath the sun and when he woke up, he was browner. At one point, Hermione began to tan with him and the two of them were underneath the sun without another thought on their mind except enjoying the days as they came. Tom stood above him. "Lovely and brown," he told him. "How are you, Harry?"

"Good, the plans are still in action, correct?"

"Yes," Tom hissed. "Let me join you."

Tom took his shirt and pants off, sitting down onto Harry's towel and began to wrap his arms around him like a snake. He pressed his lips to his skin and the two stayed there with a sleeping Hermione, basking the sun as it began to set. When it got colder, the three of them went inside, and the two tributes dressed appropriately readying themselves for their private session. Tom rolled his eyes at Harry, "you're just

sleeping."

"Hey," he holds a hand up. "It'd be very hilarious to gain a zero again."

"Besides, he's contrasting our results. I get a high number, he gets a low number."

Tom kisses him and Hermione rolls her eyes. "I'll leave you behind Harry."

Separating from Tom, he told him they could kiss more later, and the two tributes left. Harry was yawning and stepping into the waiting room where the rest of the tributes were. Entering the room, he held his hand up as if to make an announcement. "Disclaimer everyone, I am sleeping during my session. Please do not copy me." Hermione slapped a hand to her forehead as she dragged him over to where they were supposed to be sitting.

Harry yawned and scratched the back of his neck. Esteven walked over and pointed at his sunburns. "Quite sunburnt there. What were you doing all day?"

"Sleeping," he admitted. "I really want to go back to bed."

Sturgis Podmore from District 11 spoke up. "What—did you sleep in the sun or something?"

Harry crossed his arms, head tilted high. "Yes, well as Fleur Delacour likes to tell us. District 12 has the privilege to have the best floor. We have not only the penthouse and the roof. Suppose being in the worst District has its privileges, Podmore." The victors all gave him an 'are you kidding me' expression and Hermione tells everyone, "sorry - he's only pissed when he has his beauty sleep interrupted."

"I had my snake wrapped around me, you're telling me you'd rather me leave him to come to this." Harry had an epiphany, pausing, and raising an eyebrow at him. "Hypothetically Hermione, say that I didn't turn up - would I still get a zero or a blank score? Either way would suit me fine." Hermione shrugged her shoulders, stating that it probably would either and Harry stood up, heading over to the peacekeepers who were lined up at the door.

"Sir," he began to the peacekeepers on duty, "I really need to go to the bathroom."

“Really, Mr. Potter?” One of them replied to him. “No.”

“But it’s kind of urgent.”

He only got stared up. Raising his arms like he couldn’t believe the rejection, he announced to the whole room - but to the peacekeepers specifically. “Okay then?—I’ll go piss in my private session to spite you. Additionally, I think I might’ve had gluten and I’m supposed to be all gluten free. So let’s see how that shit show works.” He winked at Hermione and his District partner groaned.

He walked back over and Hermione hit his good shoulder. “You really can’t help yourself.”

Harry rolled his eyes. “Do you have water by any chance?”

She passes him her water bottle and Esteven passes him hers. Soon enough, he had seventeen water bottles in front of him and he was trying to drink all of them. Cedric rolled his eyes at the scene and left when it was his turn to be called up. Harry was full of liquids by the time he was left alone in the waiting room. The peacekeepers sighed at him. He glared at them. “I really need to go to the toilet reallllly bad. Can I go?”

“It’s still a no, Mr. Potter.”

“Okay.” He agreed.

When it was his turn to enter the waiting room, Hermione pointed her index finger at him incriminatingly but he came into the room with the biggest Chesire grin ever. Bemused and ready to torment, crossing his hands in front of the game makers they were all looking at him. Kingsley Shacklebolt rose an eyebrow at him and standing in the middle of the room, not doing anything, Abraxas Malfoy spoke up. What he realised was that he was the Game Maker that he spotted last year. “What are you going to perform for us this year?”

“The act of urinating.”

“… what?”

Harry let his bladder go wild as he stood there, smug, and an annoyance to society as the game makers heard him piss in his pants. Abraxas Malfoy yelled at him to get his act together, but he shrugged his shoulders, pretty amused with himself. It took a good minute for him to piss out everything that was in his bladder and Harry thinks it’s

probably the healthiest colour of piss he's ever seen before. It was almost clear. He nodded his head, proud. "That was my performance, ladies and gentlemen. Would you like to see piss ballerina?"

Kingsley Shacklebolt shook his head, rolling his eyes, bemused. "Go on."

Seeing enough ballerinas in the movies he's watched over the past week, he began to dance in his own piss. He hoped someone was recording. This would be the best performance they've ever seen in their dull lives. His dancing took up the rest of the minutes he had and he curtsied. Kingsley Shacklebolt began to clap his hands and what he didn't expect was to get a positive reaction out of the performance. "Thank you, thank you—" he told them. "I feel very appreciated right now. I bet none of you before have met the piss ballerina. Add it to your bucket list of the things you've now been able to accomplish."

He winks at them and waves his arm lazily in their direction, heading back to the door.

Walking past the peacekeepers who didn't allow him to go to the bathroom, he pointed his thumb at the mess he made in the private session's room, frowning. "It looks like I had an oopsie," Harry pouted and clapped the peacekeeper's shoulder before walking past him, "looks as if you'll have to clean it up for me."

Hermione was waiting for him and glanced down at the wet track he was leading behind him. She gaped, "you actually did it."

"Ladislao and Imelda would be proud of me shitting on the Capitol like this. Let them score whatever they'd like about me, I'm an icon through and through." He stripped and walked around the Tribute's Centre nude. It's not as if they wouldn't exploit him otherwise - just this way he had a choice in what he did. Hermione only stared at him and eyed him like he was crazy. He left his drenched suit and underwear behind. Someone will clean it up for him, hopefully those peacekeepers. He crossed his arms in the elevator alongside Hermione. "I hope they had a recording of me in there. I called myself the piss ballerina."

Hermione choked. "You did—what?"

"Yeah, I thought it was funny too. I danced around in my piss for like seven minutes."

"Oh my god, you're going to get killed before we even get into the

arena."

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "I don't think so - I got applauded."

Hermione had the largest sigh of defeat as they returned to their room. Tom latched onto him immediately, not even realising he was nude before Fleur shrieked in his direction - throwing a pillow at him. Tom gaped at his nude state, Harry shrugging his shoulders. "I hope I got a zero."

Fleur forced the two of them to have a bath and Harry recounted the entire story to Tom who kissed him shamelessly afterwards. Harry laughed and smiled into the passionate rampage Tom caused them both. Harry fucked Tom due to his frantic heat causing them both to become hard; Tom falling apart beneath him. Afterwards, they were both in their robes and seated on the couch out with the rest of their team. Francisca, Rhodes, Morgan, Bonavich - and Hermione's prep team, Kallisto and Soter came along to see how they both went. Harry wrapped his arms around Tom who was laying on his chest. This was their pre-marriage honeymoon, nobody was going to get in-between them or say anything about how they're both being saps.

Harry knew Gleam would be first so he got ready to see her score. Barty appeared on the screen and Tom turned his head back into his chest as they listened to his introduction. "Ladies and gentlemen, for the time you've all been waiting for - the 75th Anniversary of the Hunger Games and the 3rd Quarter Quell training scores. Let's take a look!"

"From District 1, Gleam Vestis with a score of… 11!"

"The male tribute from District 1; our beloved saviour and hero, Hero Ferror with a training score of 11!" It went on like that. Millicent Bulstrode from District 2 received a 10. Viktor Krum from District 2 received a 10. Esteven Graves from District 3 — Barty said something ridiculous about seeing her on-the-screen so soon after her son's death the previous year — received a 9. Borgin Packard from 3 received a 5. Cho Chang from 4 received a 10. Cedric Diggory received an 11.

Harry stroked Tom's hair whilst he was asleep, not wanting to see any of their scores besides Harry's - so he was to wake him up when they were close. Therma Waverly from District 5 received an7. Lymit Tydal received a 4. District 6's tributes: Cali Perth and Bronx Teal received a 3 and 2 respectively. Ilex got a 10. Atwood received a 8. District 8's tributes, Dyneema Kelsi and Muff Moire received a 5 and 3. Emmer

Teff from 9 received a 2. Ceres Houska received a 6. Emmeline Vance got an 8, and Newt Scamander received a 7 which was pretty good considering their ages.

Harry tapped Tom awake and they watched the next tribute's scores together. Acker Monterosa received an 8. Sturgis Podmore received an 2. Harry smirked, nodding at everyone in the room. Tom was bemused by his confidence he was going to receive a zero. Hermione appeared freakishly nervous, all things considered, a quivering bottom lip and shaky hands. Harry held her hand as she gripped onto it tightly. "Now," Barty begins. "What you've all been waiting for."

"District 12's first volunteer, Hermione Granger." He read the card. "She received a score of… 12."

Hermione screamed, the rest of the room bursting into noise as they all looked at her face with the number '12' besides it on the screen. Harry hugged Hermione, Tom unmoving but fist-bumping her fist when she calmed down. Kissing both their foreheads before bursting into chatter, Barty prepared Harry's card. Harry leant down and whispered into Tom's ear. "What's the chance I get a zero?"

"Slim if she got a 12. Fifty-fifty between 0 and 12."

"Ah, she's not ruining my streak."

Tom rolled his eyes and turned onto his back so he was facing the screen, Harry held his chest with his hands connected together as the rest of the stylists and others watched what happened on the screen. Barty rose his eyebrow suspiciously at the card, turning his head off-to-the-side. "Is this supposed to say this on here?" When he got confirmation that yes, it was supposed to say this on there, he sighed. "As we all know," Barty said without a hint of like for Harry in his voice, Harry flipping the screen off, "Harry Potter is our District 12 champion. Additionally, he and his 'star-worthy' performance has earned him a score of… 12." Barty rolled his eyes dramatically. "Those are all the scores for the night. Goodnight!"

Harry began to clap for himself. "I know people, I know - you don't have to say anything. Brilliant piss baby ballerina is going to take to the stage next May in theatres. Come watch me then."

Tom sighed before rolling back around so he was on his stomach and went back asleep. Hermione fist-bumped Harry and the two of them accepted they would be targeted due to Dumbledore wanting them to have more opponents in the arena.

Harry told his stylists goodnight whilst carrying Tom - kissing Hermione's cheek a goodbye, as Fleur cracked out a bottle of champagne and began to cheer her victor of not only gaining the previous year's victor but the first volunteer from District 12 - and them both having a score of 12. Pretty good life Fleur seemed to be living at the moment. Harry closed the door behind them and knew Tom was quite exhausted. Kissing his cheek, Tom pressed his lips back against his own - the two kissing softly. Harry laid down with Tom on top of him. "We're going to be okay," Tom said. "Everything is going to be okay."

"Of course," Harry smiled. "I trust everything will go to plan."

Tom appeared unsure of himself, despite this.

"I trust you with my life, Tom, don't think that otherwise ever. I wouldn't want you to."

The two didn't have any more sex, but did make out and stayed up for a bit, joking around and talking about their lives as if it wasn't going to be so bad. Tom cried again at the fact they'll be engaged and Harry chuckled softly, realising that whenever Tom felt a strong emotion - he would cry if he was unable to hold it in. He gently stroked his back, loving his boy to death. Harry thought it would be a good end for the both of them.

They held hands; and Harry wondered what it would be like if they danced with their hands tied.

Chapter End Notes

Real tired peps so not really any comments from me rn
I love when Harry does fucked up things :)

Up next, "Anti-Hero"

P S

Anti-Hero

Chapter Notes

Posted: 12th of May, 2024
Sorry for the late update guys
I'll see if I can post this chapter and technically today's chapter today but who knows

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry woke up and had a cuddly Tom latched onto him. Tom was attracted to him both literally and figuratively as his body heat warmed him like the sun. Harry wondered how offended Tom would be if he began to call him his little snake jokingly - as a tease, but admitted he'd probably find it unironically cute because Tom likes snakes. He picked up Tom, the lanky teenager weightless now that Harry had put more effort into his arms, holding him on his hip as he complained - not wanting to wake up as Harry turned the bath on. Once full, he placed Tom down and he woke up immediately due to the heat before adjusting his body temperature to the warmth, sliding down the other end of the tub. Harry stepped in after him, Tom wrapping his arms around him - like a snake. No, Tom would definitely like to be called a snake. He'll keep it to himself.

He washed them both before tying both their robes around them and returning to the living room. Hermione was in her set of baby pink robes and Harry had a grumpy Tom behind him because he was no longer carrying him as if he was some god. They ate before the treacherous journey began as all the stylists panicked and were wanting them to hurry to get to the Interview Building. Tom went to get dressed into his outfit he was going to wear at the interviews, and the two tributes left with their stylists to head to the Interview Building's backstage. Hermione was memorised.

Leaving his dressing room door open so the victors could come and go as they please, if they wanted to talk to him, his stylists began to massage his body with lotions, as Francisca lathered his 'perfect curls' in oils that would make them shine onstage and redo his braid, whilst Morgan did his makeup and Rhodes did his cuticles. The first victor to stop by was Hero.

Hero came into the room and watched him get ready, he walked in and Harry's eyes turned to his figure in the mirror. "Hello Harry," he

began.

Harry winked at Hero. “Nice makeup.”

“Uh,” Hero nervously thanked him. “How do you think your interview is going to go?”

“Shit, probably.” Harry shrugged his shoulders. “I’m going to stand there and be myself though.”

“Oh please don’t do that.”

Francisca laughed at the statement, Harry huffing at his comment. Harry had like six hours to get ready before he had to perform. Hero had three and a half. Harry told him, “everyone doesn’t want the Games to happen so I’m going to pull the most dramatic performance out of my ass. What are you doing to try and stop the Games?” Hero appeared worried at his stylists before Harry waved his hands. “These guys don’t want me to go into the Games, and neither do you. We can speak freely here.” Despite this, he was still apprehensive.

Hero began, “I was thinking of saying a speech to my ‘beloved one’ or something like that.”

Harry clicked his fingers at that, an idea popping into his head. “Hey,” he tells Morgan - who was doing his eye makeup. “I need to talk to Hermione quickly. Can we quickly pop by to see her?” His stylist, who deserved a raise at this point, sighed. “Make it quick.”

Jumping from the chair, he took Hero’s hand in his and directed him to Hermione’s room. He knocked before he entered so he didn’t burst-in on her changing or something, and she looked at the two of them. Harry went over to the makeup counter and faced her. She raised her eyebrow at him, noticing Hero in the mirror. “Yes?”

“We need to fuck this show up soooo bad, do you hear me, ‘Mione?”

“What do you want to do?” She grumbled.

“We’re like platonic right?”

“Very,” Hermione glared at him. “What are you thinking in that brain of yours?”

“Me and you - we should pretend to be star-crossed lovers and distraught.”

“That won’t work, Harry.” She plainly stated, “I volunteered.”

He put a hand to his chin, thinking, he sat on her makeup counter, Bonavich staring at him as if he was going to kill himself right then and there. He thought quickly, clicking his fingers together. “If not star-crossed lovers, perhaps we could put on some kind act and drop it immediately after we’re in the arena. Like imagine me saying, ‘well that didn’t work’ in the arena - when discussing the whole trying to stop the Games fiasco. Perhaps I could fight Barty on television or curse out everyone, that would be great.”

“Hermione,” he snaps his fingers at her. “You should recite boring poetry.”

“Like the whole three minutes?”

“Or try to rhyme with everything you say, that would be so funny. I bet Fred and George would like you more if you tried.” She rolled her eyes, flipping him off. Hermione told him, “I’m going to be strong - in comparison to everyone else and very arrogant as if I am a victor. Like we discussed, I’m going to act like the know-it-all who doesn’t actually have the right to speak any of the things I do once onstage. What are you doing, Hero?”

He shrugged his shoulders, “I don’t know. I came to ask Harry because I thought he might have an idea. I think I might go with some random 'beloved' at home.”

“Poem idea, perhaps you could take,” Harry says.

“Harry…” Hermione sighs, “why don’t you sing?”

He blinks. “Why?”

She shrugs her shoulders, telling him that he can sing and if he wanted to could shock the entire audience by singing a song that would make them want to hear more from you. As if losing you would rock their entire world. He tilted his head. “Maybe I could sing These Places? But how would I be able to bring the entire song together?”

Hermione tilted her head, snickering. “The melody is only needed on the guitar - you wrote it like that, Harry, so it would be easier to play, remember?”

“Man,” Hero shook his head. “You guys are some of the weirdest people I know.”

“Barty is going to shit his pants! I love it.” Harry said, devious.

Harry returned to his change room and Hero left, telling Harry he was going to write a speech for his beloved that he wanted to tell Barty, and the tributes began to devise their plans for how they were going to royally screw up the interviews. Harry wore a slutty outfit again. Instead of the see-through outfit, he wore nothing like a shirt. There were straps that began around his neck, like a collar, that wrapped down to his ribcage and waist. Between the gap, everything else was bare skin. His nipples and all showing. The straps connected above his belly button and the rest was high-waisted, tight black pants that were to show off his ass.

Francisca had a golden crown worn on his head with coal-like diamonds attached to every tip of the ridge. He had dark smokey-eyes again, with a hint of golden glitter. His scar was outlined to present it like a warrior mark, Harry looking at himself in the mirror and commenting. “I almost feel like fucking myself, I feel and look that good. Look at me, Francisca. I look so fantastic and hot.”

She laughed at him. “Now,” she begins. “You’d like a guitar and tuner?”

“Yes please, I’d like to sing in my interview.”

“Alright, I’ll see what I can do.”

Gleam went onto the stage and began to cry about leaving the Capitol, Barty sympathetic with her. She wore all gold and appeared quite goddess-like. She ruined her makeup completely by crying, probably asking for more mascara than necessary to pull off the ruined-look. She held a hand to her heart and told them that she would miss them dearly. Cries from the audience began and he was loving this. It was like everything absurd he did all the time was going to act minimum with the acts everyone else was putting on to try and stop the Games. He grabbed his phone and texted his friends, ‘make sure to catch my performance on camera please - These Places.’

‘What?—Really. Alright then — Nathaniel.’

‘Gonna pull the performance from my ass. Xox.’

Gleam took her spot at the corner of the stage, waiting for the next tribute to arrive. Barty called out Hero Ferro and on walked the prepared and hot teenager. He was wearing a slutty outfit, what was up with all these slutty outfits? He’s becoming too attracted to

everyone. His bisexualness was killing him. Hero told Barty how he had a 'beau' back at home (taking that line from him!) and how he wanted to say a speech to her. It was all cringe and overdone but it made the audience cry as if he was talking about them. Harry rolled his eyes, clapping at the screen. "Good job." Hero even wiped tears from the corners of his eyes, his dramatic bastard, but then he remembered that he did have a lover at home that he couldn't love properly because of the Games and what a victor had done to him — he sighed, frowning.

He was only eighteen at the end of the day. It was young to go through what he did.

Cedric too, he now realises, he's eighteen too.

Millicent told Barty all about her family and guilt-tripped them that way. Victor was stoic on the stage, talking about facts as if he was purposefully not dipping his toes in the subject, but when Barty brought up what his family thought of him going back into the arena, Victor bursted out into tears. It was automatic and Harry clapped wildly at his performance. Barty was unable to comfort him as Victor kept on crying. He didn't even say anything, only cried. His performance was so far the best. Look at all these victors, crying, and upset. This is who you call the strongest among us, Dumbledore?— Harry and Hermione were going to show them.

Francisca smiled at Harry, returning with a glittery black guitar and a tuner. Harry put the tuner on the guitar and began to match the pitch to the tightness of the strings, plucking them to match the sound. Esteven had a beautiful act. She was dressed up like her son and it was all about him, and little about her other children. If she was a part of her alliance, Esteven would be able to see her other kids after this. Never, Silver though. His name forever remains in the deaths of the tributes in the Hunger Games.

Barty was having trouble, balancing all these heavy emotions everyone was bringing to the table. Then, Borgin cursed them out - unpleasant in the interview, stating he didn't want to be there anyway and a bore to be around, irritating the fuck out of Barty - Harry was having a splendid time. He began to practice the lyrics whilst strumming the guitar, balancing his nerves with knowing that if he fucked it all up - he could make it the most destructive performance of his entire life. Cho's interview only had her weeping, which Harry found a bit pathetic but everyone was crying so realistically, they were all pathetic as each other! Except, Borgin. He was a bit of a mad

lad which Harry liked. Harry watched Cedric go up onto the stage and declare his love to some random girl he made up and not Cho, so they could pretend they weren't together. The saps of the Capitol all thought it was about them. It was ridiculous.

The performances of the victors were quite dull: Hermione came into his room and laughed with him at all the different acts they were putting on. Ilex swore and screamed and yelled at all of them, and Harry applauded her widely. Hermione smirked.

By the time it got to Hermione's go, Harry kissed her cheek for good-luck. She wore a dark dress that had a see-through train slipping over her hair as if she was getting the opposite to married. Attending a funeral. She was like a princess and Harry shot a few pictures before they exited his changing room to their friends. He also sent photos of himself, but mostly the two of them together - making funny faces and doing serious shots. On the side of the stage, he watched her as she introduced herself to the world. She was doing a magnificent good job at acting arrogant.

Hermione had a mixed reaction to her interview and walked onto the back where all the other victors were standing and lining up, Harry getting ready to go on. Barty Crouch Junior straightened up his suit before announcing to everyone. "And our last tribute's interview for the night, from District 12, Harry Potter."

He took two seconds longer than he needed to - to step onto the stage and walk towards the audience with his guitar strapped to his body. Barty appeared mortified at the instrument he had on hand and Harry was loving every second of it. "Well, Harry Potter. It hasn't been long since we last spoke, hasn't it?"

"Not really, no." Harry agreed. "I thought tonight would be the night where I showed everyone what I could do. Singing is permitted, correct?"

"It's not not…"

"Lovely," he manoeuvred himself from Barty so it was as if he was throwing shade in his direction. "Hello, you wonderful crowd!" He grinned brightly, his dimples showing. "I was thinking as it was my last opportunity to perform and because you were shut a good crowd last time I was onstage, I was thinking about givin' you guys a treat. How did you guys feel about that?" The audience went wild with the drama that he was practically feeding them. "I'm sorry but this might

take a minute longer than it's supposed to so I'm hoping you slide it by."

"But Harry," Barty begins, "we can't exactly allow you to have more time than the others—"

"Okay then," he sighs instantly, "we'll just have to sing an unfinished song then."

Barty glared at him but Harry began to perform anyway, ignoring the outrage from the crowd. Strumming the guitar with the right fingers in place, he confidently matched the same pace he would've sung this song at if he was back at home. It had been a while since he performed it last so he was glad he had practised the lyrics beforehand. These Days - the Capitol Censored Version.

Thinkin' about the old ways,
About when I was scrubbin' for a raise
Thinkin' about the displays,
Our Capitol loves to praise
Thinkin' about me and you,
And all of these days

Like always, the dancing came along with the singing and playing - unable to stop himself. Clapping from the crowd matched the speed he was playing at and he told them to dance along with him. Being unforgettable this time means he can truly shine. He grinned and didn't stop; this was probably going to be the largest crowd he'd ever get.

My ol' school teacher Ms. Grays,
Told me I could've never sing,
Never dance, never sway
But I'm up here now - proving its my thing
And how—oh, I'll amaze
Come take it from me
All the strings
Pluck 'em, tease 'em, cut 'em
Turn 'em into different things
Make me a bird, make me a singing one
Change me from all these days in which I love
Pretty little dove, that's me
The king of beasts; and the beloved
Take me to where the birds go
Take me high and low

Let me wings reshape the Earth - Panem's sky
And everywhere below and high
Hear my chirp, my firing call
Everyone, let's hear my song

Oh, how the youngs ones are taught how to die
Oh, how the victors are presented high
Oh, when the time comes in every July
Oh, daughter and son, never ask why
Because the world needs fury and lies
So hereby,
These days have come-by

Oh, tell your son and daughter, it's their time
Where they'll see, the rivers covered in grime
When the rooftop starts shakes,
and there is crime
So the river begins to break
Sometimes,
I think my earth is quakin'
With the sound of love, and strength
It's truly breaking

He stopped when it was time for him to stop. He told the microphone, "thank you but I think that's all for the day," and the audience was outraged. So was Barty and it was part jealousy, part disgust. Although, he wasn't really trying. The beginning of the song was true, and in the actual song he created but afterwards, he free-styled. He grew bored and wanted to sing something that would really grind on Dumbledore's teeth. He grinned, waving to the audience as he stood on the stage. Hermione murmured to him, "that wasn't the song."

"Yeah, I know. But why give them the real one, it's not as if they deserve it."

The crowd went wild, asking for more and it was exactly what he wanted to hear. They cried and it was the loudest it had ever gotten. Harry took off his guitar and threw it off to the side without a care. It made a big bang and Hermione took his hand. He rose his eyebrow at what she was doing, but she didn't make a big deal out of it. Until all their arms were in the air, showing their mutual support in-wanting to stop the Games. Harry didn't smile, he didn't appear happy at all. It was their last attempt to stop the Games — and then, it all went dark.

Screams and shouts from the victors followed. "Ah, fuck you!" Harry

screamed out, trying to find his way down, assisting Hermione. “As if you’ll get another song now!”

She clenched onto him tightly and the two of them got off the stage together.

“Everyone alright?” He shouted back to where the other victors were.

“Sure, dove—“ Hero snickered at his joke.

Harry rolled his eyes and went back to help the victors. It didn’t take long before the backstage was crowded with all of them. Harry sat on top of Victor’s shoulders as they walked back to the Tribute’s Centre together. As a result of Harry being on his shoulders, Hermione was socially allowed to be close to Victor. He sighed, “I hope you all know that wasn’t the actual lyrics.”

Esteven spoke up. “Really? It sounded quite real to me.”

“Yeah, everything past ‘and all of these days’ was fake. The actual song goes like this.” Harry didn’t sing the lyrics, he only spoke them. “I rush through the forest — breathing heavily, I trip through my dreams — forgetting longevity. I climb through the trees — steadily. I plunge through my nightmares — accidentally. All the sights in the Games in which I saw, made me retrace my step, made me rethink my thoughts Oh no, I’ve forgotten to withdraw. Everyone sees me breathing. All the cries, all the flaws. Rushin’ through the trees like a bee to honey; hurrin’ through my memories only finding the bloody. I wanna forget now, I wanna stop shakin’ now.”

“And that’s not even the entire song,” Hermione said — all eyes on them.

“She was there when I wrote it.”

Hermione smirks, “I know a lot of words.”

Borgin juts his chin out. “Yes, I think we all know you’re a genius by now, Ms. Granger.”

Harry laughed at the comment and she whacked his upper thigh in response. Victor ignored their childish-like antics and they walked through the street back to the Tribute’s Centre happy. Harry was overjoyed by the turn of events and knew the next big one was inside of the Games. Harry readied himself.

Tom walked through the streets of Panem, listening to the song Harry sung on live-television. He was heading to The Study which was the name for the Rebel's base. Finding himself at the front door, hidden away from the rest of the world, he knocked and had a gun pointed at his forehead. Crick lowers the gun when she sees him, letting him in, Neuro chuckled at Tom when he saw him. "Your lover boy is singing a Ballad, Tom. What are your thoughts on this?"

"He sings beautifully," he says. "But I know he's only playing the Capitol. How's the aircraft?"

"Ready," Neuro types into the computer. Gamma pointed at the screen. "Nearly - we have a few things to get ready." Tom picked up the list of names of the people who they were saving. Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, Esteven Graves, Cedric Diggory, Cho Chang, Ilex, Emmeline, Newt, Victor… Hero… Gleam… Millicent… It wasn't necessary, they saved them all but Harry and Hermione, yes, and the more alive the better.

Tom sat down and knew he was going to have to hide out here whilst they got their plans in order. "The meeting with Kingsley Shacklebolt is tonight?"

"Eleven o'clock. Tomorrow, the Games will begin - in three days' time, we will save them." Tom took a deep breath and began to get ready. Neuro, Gamma, Crick, Andromeda, Ted, Meios, Splice, Cornelia, Dean, and Tom all took their luggage to the aircraft they were going to stay in for the next three days until they got to District 13. Neuro's mother came with them and stayed in the personalised room he had for himself. Tom placed all his things and Harry's things with him. He wanted to make sure that he had all the things necessary for Harry's comfort.

Finding himself in the computer-tech room, he began to analyse the data on the thing. Neuro sat beside him and began to play with another video-game Francisca brought for him. Tom asked, "with Francisca — and the kidnapping of the prep team, we do it tonight — yes?" Neuro agrees with him, yawning.

"Yes," he finishes his yawn, rubbing at his eyes. "They'll be out partying until late so kidnapping them one by one should be easy and no one will notice that they are gone until the Hunger Games are fully commenced." Tom jots the note down, Crick and Cornelia going on

that mission together. Dean was driving to pick them all up and bring them back to their aircraft.

Tom got everything ready - he was becoming like the Mastermind of the Rebels. None of the Capitol knew of who they were because he was able to integrate their plans soundly into the everyday world. Small steps that wouldn't have curious eyes looking at them. No, they'd be looking at Harry. A light so bright that nothing could dim him even if he wasn't trying to be suspicious. Everything about Harry was screaming red flags and they were using his presence to mask his own. The whole Quarter Quell thing was in their favour as well when it was occurring.

Right after Harry's win meant all eyes on him. The volunteer, Hermione Granger, from District 12 put more eyes onto them. Esteven Graves' presence due to her son's death in the previous Games to said Harry Potter. Alliance between all the Districts, banding together to stop the Games—this was all a cause of Harry. Everywhere was Harry's influence. Remus Lupin stood behind him. "Is it time to begin the plans?"

"Yes," Tom says. "Harry's done a fantastic job."

"Does he know that you manipulated him?"

"He doesn't know what I'm doing but he knows it's for the best." Tom tells Remus, who appears perplexed at him. Harry knew things, even more than what he told him. He was intuitive, smart, clever, a guessing-game genius but he couldn't know everything: if so, he would be too open about it. There wasn't a single part of Harry that was a closed book. Except him. The plan was this, have the rest of the allied victors guided both him and Hermione to victory. To the escape. To give up their lives for the sake of his. Tom was going to murder them otherwise. He cleared his throat. "Harry is a spotlight and for some reason, has Dumbledore's attention. The only reason Dumbledore suspected me before was because Harry and I were conversing. Now, I only go when I can - not even risking the small moments. I love Harry, I won't ever love someone else the way I do with him. And I know for sure, this is the best way to save his life from that arena."

Remus asked, "you didn't know?"

Tom glared back at him. "Kingsley didn't tell me about it."

"Not until it was announced."

“My reaction was genuine.”

Remus didn’t say anything more about his reaction. He began to tell him about Sirius, Harry’s godfather who Tom got in contact with a few months prior. “Sirius has taken Esteven’s remaining children with him on his pursuit out of District 3. A woman, though, stopped him on the way. Her name is Amelia Bones — Susan Bone’s aunt. She wanted to assist him. They’re heading to District 8 and will pick up a few more rebels before heading to District 13 — leading District 12 to safety. His adopted children, Nathaniel, Abelene, and Sibyl have been taking small babies and mothers out of District 12 so most of the next generation has a chance to survive… what you think are going to be the bomb attacks.”

Tom narrowed his eyes. “Harry’s clever,” he said. “He knew it before I did.”

Remus agreed. “He’s been planning this for a while ever since you weren’t able to see him at the Victory Tour. I think he was anticipating something bad happening and being able to conquer it head-on, ergo, the presence he was putting onto himself.”

“Has he always had such a hero-complex?” He queried. “I feel like it’s more extreme now.”

“Ever since the Games he’s been like this.”

“After I was gone?”

“Yes.”

Tom and Harry would never be apart again. They would be able to marry. They would be able to sleep in the same bed without being afraid of them being caught. They would be able to show and pronounce their love to others. Harry had to be brave and strong for the next few days and then, they’d never have to separate again. Tom thanked Remus and told him if he could stay on standby, that would be pleasant as Francisca and the rest of the stylists would be brought in. Fleur, as well, due to much discussion because she would die otherwise. Harry wouldn’t like her death, even if he didn’t like her that much.

Two hours later, Crick signalled. “All stylists have been caught.”

“Clear,” he accepted and understood the message.

District 13's Leader was a hard man to understand. His name was Gellert Grindelwald and he was an eighty year-old man. Tom was their spokesperson, being the President's Successor, and having the most credibility in the group - which meant he had to speak to him the most. He was vain, arrogant, narcissistic, and cruel, Tom found after a lot of investigation into his personality. He thought of District 13 to be superior to all and was happy to band together to take down the Capitol. He was power hungry and calculating; and he hated Dumbledore — for a personal reason he was going to find out one way or another. Having to deal with two abusers who had massive amounts of power, it was almost a matter of protecting Harry.

He didn't want Harry to meet Grindelwald until absolutely necessary. The man would take after Harry immediately, due to Dumbledore's obscene obsession with him. Tom was on a fine line and he wasn't about to bring down Harry with him quicker than he had to. Kingsley Shacklebolt was taming the President of his worries whilst he was taming the Commander. Tom had to play his cards right, but if anything, the rebellion Tom is being the spokesperson for is one of the soundest rebellion groups he thinks there is.

When the President falls, so will the Commander: Tom will make sure of it, and put another trusted person in power through vote, and Panem will find a sense of normalcy about it. Hopefully, both Tom and Harry are dead before another war breaks out and the cycle of war continues but for now - they'll fix the societal issues in front of them together, one at a time, and play their political cards right. Tom sends Harry a text - knowing it was going to be the last time he was going to speak to him again before the aircraft picked him up. 'Harry, your singing is beautiful as always. The outfit was stunning and I wished I was there. Destroy this phone before you go into the arena by erasing all the data on it and flushing it down the toilet. Smashing beforehand, even better. Fleur… isn't going to escort either or you. Nor is Remus. Trust me on this. Tell Hermione that you'll have to change yourselves into your suits for the arena. They're well protected and everything is coming together nicely. I love you Harry, whatever you do, make sure you stay with 3, 4, 7, and 10. They've got victors ready to help you. Again, I'll see you on the way out.'

He didn't get a text late that night back. 'I love you too, stay alive.'

Tom sighed and hid his eyes between his hands. He sniffled and sobbed, eyes red raw as he wiped them profusely. The act of leaving Harry was hurting his soul but it was for the better, he would get him out. He was the first priority, everyone else was secondary. Neuro

entered the room he was in, tilting his head. “Is this a bad time?”

“Sorry, Harry texted me back.”

“… he’s okay. I’d understand why you’d be like this.”

Tom straightens his neck and gets rid of all the tears. He was a rebel now, this was the life he chose. Not an orphan. Not a to-be president. The Rebel. The rebel he was always told to hate, the rebellion he was always taught how to demise if things were turning out for the bad. “What do you have to report?”

Neuro hands him an iPad. “The aircraft has issues with the clawing machine; it’s to do with the wires and the rust. This aircraft hasn’t been used in quite awhile from the looks of it and we’re going to have to do some real improvements over the next couple of days in the sky.”

“Anything else?”

“Crick, Cornelia, and Dean return with the stylists.” Tom stands up and begins to head off to the entrance. Cornelia is crying for some reason or another, which he doesn’t understand but accepts, and notices the red marks around her eyes. Neuro explains, “Fleur pepper-sprayed her.”

“That bitch,” Cornelia groaned - crying. “I’m going to make sure she’s restrained forever.”

“Okay,” Dean sighs. “Let’s not go that far.”

Inside of the truck they stole, were the six stylists: Francisca, Morgan, Rhodes, Bonavich, Kallisto, and Soter—and the single escort, Fleur Delacour. Tom told Dean to unravel and ungag Francisca, his stylist crying with fright. “Tom? Neuro?—what is happening?” Tom took a deep breath, looking at all the Capitol-citizens who were innocent in this affair.

He told him how things were plainly. “The President is going to kill you guys for being associated with me. I didn’t want that to happen so Neuro and I took you all from the access he might’ve had, and now you’re safe. Additionally, he has all your makeup bags so you’ll still be able to do your professions.” Grindelwald was only going to accept the prep team if they became District 13’s prep team. Andromeda and Ted were raiding their houses for supplies. “Additionally, you’ll be safe from the war. I can’t say much for your families or friends, but when

it hits it's going to be hard. And Harry and I wanted you safe and advocated for your freedom. Accept this or die."

"Tom," Francisca had tears in her eyes. "Is Harry going to be safe?"

"We're doing everything that we can, follow me, France." Over the past year, Tom was distant with Francisca to keep her safe but that didn't mean his protective feelings over her had changed in the slightest during the time that had passed. He brought her to the control room where Kingsley's face was on the screen, she was surprised. "Kingsley Shacklebolt is this year's Head Game Maker. He's also a part of the plan to break out the tributes from the arena. Harry is going to survive this, France." Tom said, gulping, nervously. "I'll make sure he survives. He's the number one on our priorities list."

Francisca touches his shoulders, sniffling. "You can say your list Tom, he's your fiancé."

Tom looked down at his feet and she hugged him. "You're so brave," she told him.

"I'm not, I'm really not."

"You're doing this for him. You're going against everything you were taught when you were a child, Tom, to be with him. To have him live. Him, isn't you. So you're being brave out of love and nobility—a true Capitol-citizen who would do anything to protect your family, I understand."

"You do?" Tom swallowed. "How?"

She held his face. "Because you, Neuro, and Harry are my family, Tom. I care for you and I'll accept this fate if it means being able to protect my family this way. By being here to support you!" Francisca knitted her eyebrows together, bothered. "However, you should've told me earlier. I would've loved to support you and help you. But, yes. I'm still very proud of you. Is Neuro here?"

"And his mother. They'll both be safe in District 13."

"Good boy," Francisca kissed his forehead. "I'm so proud of you."

She was like a mother to him, Tom was coming to admit to himself. She might be naive like a child, she might be dependent on fashion and trends and scandals to keep friends, she might be a total product of her environment: but she was inherently kind to anyone she saw

worth protecting. Fierce, like how Tom would imagine a mother to be. Neuro didn't appreciate Francisca like he did because he had a mother — Tom's never known what this feeling was before.

Tom took Francisca to her bedroom. She would be living with Morgan, Fleur, and Kallisto. Rhodes, Bonavich, and Soter would sleep together in the same room. It was to save room for the victors when they retrieved them. She picked the nicest bed and Tom went to retrieve the other stylists, but they were feisty. Morgan was the first to accept her defeat. "Gosh, this sickly power of love has gotten me kidnapped. I knew I shouldn't of helped you meet Harry that first night."

"Are you going to fight against us?" He asked.

"I would be stupid to. Just let me go, I have no family to go back to." She sighs, reserved.

The rest took a while to break-in, especially Fleur Delacour who told them that she had a younger sister who she wasn't about to leave in the Capitol. Texting Andromeda, she told him and Ted to kidnap her ten year-old sister and left it at that. Morgan was set up with Francisca, and Kallisto took the other bed after convincing. Bonavich was defeated, Rhodes was angry, and Soter was bored. Neuro entertained the boys with his video games whilst Gamma told more information about the mission to the girls. Tom kept in-touch with everyone to make sure the plans were going well and everyone was on the line.

When eleven o'clock came around, Tom talked to Kingsley about the last minute additions to the plan before the Games in the morning and he told him everything that he needed to know before they began to plan. Before midnight on the third night, Kingsley was going to leave early, and Tom was going to pick him up with the aircraft before taking all of them to the arena - where one of the tributes would either break them in, or they did it themselves.

Kingsley told Tom about what Dumbledore thought about Harry, at that moment, saying he was definitely somehow involved with the rebellion - what Dumbledore was going to find, despite this, was a lack of knowledge of Harry if something were to happen to him.

When midnight came around, Neuro sent a message to him that Andromeda, Ted, and the girl were with them. Tom went to talk to them and found a lot of stuff they had nicked from the stylists' houses.

The girl, Gabrielle, was nervous when speaking to him. “Hello,” she began. “You’re the President’s Successor, Tom Riddle, aren't you?”

“We have your sister, I’m assuming you’d like to see her.” Tom told her. “Come with me.”

When Fleur saw her sister, she hugged her and kissed her forehead. This woman was going to be the death of the plan. Gabrielle was overjoyed to see her sister, but Fleur only sighed in defeat. “Come on, Gabrielle,” she said. “We’re going to be staying here with Mr. Riddle as he looks after the both of us.”

“Yes,” he told them. He glared at Fleur. “Happy now?”

“Very.”

“I’ll show you to your room, then. Fleur, you’re going to have to share a bed with your sister since we didn’t plan to get her.” Fleur accepted that immediately and she was shown to the bedroom the female stylists were in. At the sight of the ten year-old child, Neuro blinked in confusion, nudging Tom. “What is a child doing here?”

“That’s Fleur’s sister.”

“I reckon we should’ve left her out of the agreement.”

Tom inhales, shaking his head at the statement. “Harry wouldn’t have accepted her death if she knew we could’ve saved her.” Neuro shrugged his shoulders and went into the bedroom after advising, perhaps he could give Gabrielle some entertainment with his video-games. Tom went back to the meeting room where Andromeda, Ted, Crick, Gamma, Cornelia, Dean, Meios, and Splice were recovering from all the gathering. Splice distracted the police, whilst Meios kept the stylists’ friends entertained - not knowing they had taken them. They appeared exhausted.

“Rest up everyone,” he told them. “We’ve got a big day tomorrow.”

“I saw Narcissa.” Andromeda told him. Tom blinked in surprise, asking what happened. “She was surprised to see me, since I had moved out and broken contact between us - but she asked me what I was going to do. I told her she needed to leave the Capitol and head to the Districts if she wanted to live. I don’t know what she is going to do but she knows about you and Harry, which is dangerous. Bella’s still in the dark about the entire thing. What do you think?”

“I mean… too many people are going to get involved if you offer the aircraft.”

“Yes, that’s what I thought saw ell. She’ll understand where to hide I think.”

“Good, she’s a dear friend and your sister, she doesn’t deserve to die.”

Tom sits at the head of the table, hands together. “Let’s begin with a run down of the plan, yes.” No one rejects. “Remus Lupin is going to go back after tonight and with the help of Burke, Lika, Suede, and Furze, they’re going to be all sponsoring the alliance — twenty-four pieces of bread, deciding the hour, and of the sponsored District — deciding what day it’s taking place. Harry sort of has an idea that this is happening, and Hermione would decipher it easily enough, knowing how quick and smart she is. However, knowing about the rebel hand beforehand will keep them both quiet about the entire thing. They’ll go along with the flow so long as nothing seems suspicious around them.”

“We were discussing before who would take their trackers.” Dean said. “Do we know?”

“Cedric is going to do Harry’s and Ilex will do Hermione’s. The rest of them will do their own thing.” Neuro hands him the iPad, “we also have another issue to address with the claw machine of the aircraft. It’s quite rusted so we’re going to need to find oil so multiple people can swiftly get up the claw. Additionally, we don’t want it to be stuck - and so I’ll have to figure out the odd wiring too. Crick, would you be able to buy oil at some point, Neuro, Gamma, and I are going to try and figure this out together tomorrow morning.”

“Alright,” she said. Over the past year, Crick lost her hostility for him. Tom proved himself many times to the group. He would be killed immediately - if he was found out. Tom continued, “Andromeda - Ted - Dean. I’m going to need you guys to search for more food, utilities— medicines. I’m not sure what injuries the tributes are going to have on their way outs.”

“Yes, sir.”

“When did you become the boss?” Andromeda grumbled, narrowing her eyebrows at him, pouting. Ted nudged her, “he’s a good organiser. Let him do his thing.” Ted smiled at him. “We’ll do it.” Andromeda rolled her eyes. “Yeah, sure.”

“For now, that’s all the information I’ve conjured.” Tom yawns, wiping his eyes. “I’m going to go to sleep. Gamma’s on the night watch and probably would’ve been anyway since she’s obsessed with the problem with the wires, and everyone else should get a good rest. We’ll start more of the tasks tomorrow at ten.” He stands up and heads down the hallway to get to his room. Turning off the lights, he practically fell into the bed - ready to fall asleep. He turned onto his back, looking up to the roof of the room. Harry’s going to live. They’re going to be okay. He will make sure of it.

Tom is such a problem: it’s even irritating him how rebellious he’s being.

And Tom would do everything all over again if it meant Harry’s safety - and protection under the new regime that would do a lot more to look after him. Grindelwald might be a dick and an asshole, but he didn’t have the ability to hurt Harry. Not whilst Tom was around. Now, to rescue him from the arena. That was their main goal. *Him*.

Chapter End Notes

Not a lot to comment today but:
Free Palestine **P S** donate $.50, $1, $5 to any go-fund-me organisations that you can; it'll help tremendously.

Next chapter, "the 1"

the 1

Chapter Notes

Posted: 12th of May, 2024
I hope 2 chapters makes up for the past week

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Harry wakes up in the morning, jittery.

He has a shower - lathering his hair with shampoos and conditioners before rinsing it all out — brushes his teeth, hides his engagement ring underneath his brace, put his hair up into the smallest ponytail imaginable, rather having a hair-tie than not in the arena with his small braid, and changing into his body suit they supplied for him. Afterwards, he grabbed the phone, showed Hermione the contents on it before deleting all the data, smashing the phone, and flushing it down the toilet. Together, they had breakfast together, noting all the lack of people. They walked down together after eating and neither said anything. Harry could understand Hermione's nervousness as she played with her hair she put into a simple braid (being easier to manage). It was her first time entering the Hunger Games. She didn't want to die, but she wouldn't because Harry was going to look after her.

The two of them headed over to where the rest of the victors were beginning to walk over to the aircraft that was going to take them to the arena, and once seated inside, he found himself next to Hero and Esteven. He bit his bottom lip, telling the two of them, "last year when all of us were waiting here - we were discussing the possibility of the arena being entirely in-the-dark and our different accents. I think it was perhaps the only moment where I was involved with the Careers."

"You and the Careers?" Esteven rose her eyebrow.

"Not really," Harry told her. "Susan and I had our first discussion; Alistar, somehow joined in; Valor due to Susan's social presence joined in; and so did Persephone. I think I was the only outlier joining in on the conversation if I was going to be totally honest with you, only because I had the balls and we were discussing the most random of things. Like that," he pointed at the needle gun that had their trackers in them. "We talked about that hurt, bad."

“Yeah,” Hero sighed. “I think I was so hung up on the pain from it - I wasn’t able to concentrate well for the blood bath.”

“That’s what Valor and I were talking about.”

He stopped speaking when Millicent glared at him. The Capitol-citizen asked him to hold out his hand. He closed his eyes and gritted his teeth when the tracker went into his arm. Opening his eyes again, he went faint. Hero watched with nerves. Esteven held his head up as Harry regained his vision. He was wearing his contacts. “Ohhh…” Hero irked at the sight, looking up to the Hunger Games doctor anxiously. Harry took his hand and squeezed, telling him to suck it up and that it wasn’t that bad. He lied. Hero hissed when the injection went into his skin. “That hurts more leaving my skin than entering,” he says.

“I know.” Harry complains.

The group wasn’t by all means silent. A lot of the victors knew each other. Hero touched his braid and glanced at the design of it whilst Esteven showed Harry her token. It was a pendant of her three children. Silver, Radian, and Iris. She didn’t have a husband anymore, dying from the outbreak that happened in District 3 the year prior - the two youngest children and the victor mourning over both their brother/son and father/husband in the same year. Esteven was perhaps one of the strongest women that he knew. Landing next to the arena, the opening of the aircraft led them underground. As he was first, like the last time, he planted a kiss on Hermione’s cheek before waving to them all. “May the odds be ever in your favour.”

Entering the room, Harry found a note on the table of the room. He smiled when he saw it was from Tom. “This letter is biodegradable, you can eat it afterwards. I’ve talked with Morgan and Bonavich, and they say your outfits are meant for the sea and tropical weather where it's humid and wet. I’ve written this same letter to Hermione. Good luck, love x.” Harry kissed the letter before eating it, nodding his head when he did realise it was biodegradable - melting in his mouth.

He sat on the table and waited until it was time for the tributes to enter the tube. Harry took his time and entered the cylinder, wondering what would happen if he didn’t get in: waiting outside and not entering. Shrugging his shoulders, knowing it would fuck up the entire plan, he waited until he began to rose up to the arena. Hermione must be freaking out, he figured, and nervous as all hell. Harry’s first mission was to find her.

Squinting his eyes when he arose above the podium, standing on top of it, he had a minute to glance around the arena. It was enormous compared to his last Games. Now this, he thought, was what an arena was supposed to look like. There was water, and for which he was glad he taught Hermione and himself how to swim better over the past two weeks to prepare for this. Harry noticed it was cut like a pizza, the arena. There were two tributes per slice that made up twelve slices. It bugged him for some reason, the announcer continuing to say the time. “Twenty-four, twenty-three, twenty-two, twenty-one…”

Hermione must be opposite of the arena. Victor was beside him and in the slice beside him was Gleam. He puffed, noticing both the Careers who were going to try and kill him. Victor was a Career for their plan to work. Swim, that’s all he had to do, nobody could kill him immediately. “Five, four, three, two, one…”

Harry dived into the water and began to swim straight towards the rocks that split the slices. It took a minute for him to get to the rocks, climbing up them and he noticed Gleam getting up on the rocks beside him. Running towards the cornucopia, he chanted the mantra in his head. He prepared for this for months - swimming, running, endurance - he’s prepared. He was careful with his step but kept pushing forward. He must be the first at the cornucopia as he grabbed two long knives, an axe for Hermione, and a trident. Noticing Cedric, he nodded his head at the teenager. “Here.” He threw him the trident and he caught it. Without a word, Harry knew they were allies.

Cedric told him to tuck and he did. His trident went into the body of a tribute he didn’t recognise, they kept moving as they tried to find their allies. Cedric grabbed a knife for his girlfriend, the two heading over to where she was pointing in the distance. It was Hermione. She was fighting Cali who was trying to drown her. Cedric immediately jumped into the water to save her. Harry’s eyes widened and realised he should go back for the bow and arrow he saw. Passing Cho a knife, he said he would be back.

Hurrying back to the cornucopia, he snuck around and saw Victor - he held his hands up, rushing forward for the bow and set of arrows as he narrowly dodged the knife Victor threw at him. Harry glared at him. “Hermione’s dying over there - someone’s trying to drown her, I need these.” Victor stopped and watched as Harry rushed back to try and shoot Cali who was drowning them both. A cannon went and Harry’s heart immediately went still. Hermione bursted up from the water, coughing out water as Cedric reached her. “Motherfucker,” she glared

- angry.

“Are you alright?” Harry shouted.

Hermione’s attention turned to him. “I should be.”

Cedric helped Hermione swim back to the rocks where Harry helped her up. Harry gave Hermione the axe he took from the cornucopia and she hugged him, “thanks.” Patting her back, the alliance noticed the Careers circling the cornucopia and monopolising all the weapons. Harry glared in their direction, knowing he didn’t want any of them to die, before rushing off with his alliance. Another cannon went, along with two others. Four were dead so far. The group ran onto the beach and began to hurry into the forest. “Who else is a part of our alliance?” Cedric asks.

“Esteven, Borgin, Ilex, Atwood, Emmeline, and Newt.” Hermione told him.

“Alright, we’re going to have to keep an eye out for them.”

Slowing down, knowing the Careers weren’t going to come after them immediately, the four stopped to have a fresh breather before continuing to walk into the forest. Hermione eyed all of the types of trees and plants. “Definitely tropical,” she said. “There are going to be a lot of bugs, insects, and rain by the looks of it. And many species.”

“Mutts,” Cho, Cedric, and Harry all said.

“How wonderful,” Harry rolled his eyes.

After little discussion and still trying to see how far away they could get from the beach, Harry whacked an insect from his face. They were bothersome and Harry’s never had to deal with this type of annoying bug before. The moisture in the air was making them all dehydrated and Harry noticed when they all began to sweat in their suits with the heat. Cho appeared conflicted, turning to him. “You know how to swim?”

Harry smiled, Cedric leading the group with Hermione in-between the two Careers. “I learnt when I was young swimming in the pretty big bathtub for the time.” At total lie. He had swimming lessons with Tom and they learnt together in the big aquatic centre next to the orphanage. “I taught a few kids at 12 how to swim when they were babies as well. Hermione already knew because of her parents but as you know, there aren’t exactly bodies of water at 12 for us to learn

and practise in." Harry asked, "when did you learn how to swim?"

"We learn as babies. Our parents put us into free-lessons."

"That's cool," Harry smiled. "That must mean you guys are quite experienced. What did you want to do when you grew up besides being in the Hunger Games?"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I always found fishing to be interesting. Perhaps teach the little kids how to swim, I'm not sure, but that idea would be nice." Harry stepped over a bunch of roots and suddenly, in front of them, a large burst of energy exploded. Cedric was on the ground, eyes closed and chest not rising - Hermione screaming for Harry's name as he came over and began to resuscitate him. The two girls watched, Hermione calming Cho down. Harry pressed both hands above his chest, pressing down to mimic his heart beating on its own, and breathing air into his mouth — continuing the cycle until eventual Cedric breathed.

Harry slumped back exhausted as Cho cried and huddled over her boyfriend, Hermione touching his injured shoulder delicately. He was exhausted. All the adrenaline fading from his body, Hermione's hand making its way to his forehead, she said. "Let's find a place to sleep for the night." Whispering in his ear, "you're burning-up," she assisted him to a stop in the ground where Cho carried Cedric too.

The four were all in a desperate need for a drink as they sat there, recovering.

Instantly, Hermione spat in her hand and rubbed her saliva across his forehead. Harry knitted his eyebrows shut and held his knife close as he felt himself falling asleep. Waking up later, with less tension between his brows, he realised all of them were asleep but Hermione. She had purple circles underneath her eyes and was holding Harry up. Noticing that he was awake, she pressed her hand to his forehead again. "Better," she whispered. "You seemed to be overheating before. I took off your suit so you'd be able to cool down again." Hermione pointed down to his lack of clothes from his waist up.

"Cedric is going to be fine but he's in shock. Cho's an emotional mess and wouldn't sleep until I practically had to force her to close her eyes." The sun was still up but it was beginning to set. "I hate this weather, it's so humid and there isn't a drop of water around anywhere."

"Go to sleep, 'Mione. I'll keep watch."

“Alright, you’ll be my pillow then.”

Tilting her head onto his shoulder, he glanced down at his brace. Using his left fingers to fiddle around underneath it, he softly smiled at the ruby. It was the perfect wedding ring. Noticing how sore his right wrist felt, he took off both the wedding ring and brace so nothing was remaining. He kept them on his lap as he glanced at the scarring on his veins. It was not a pretty sight and he knitted his eyebrows together due to the tension as he leaned back against the tree.

Nobody was awake for hours. Looking up past the long slim trees, he watched the sunset and heard two more cannons go off. Harry wondered who they were before stroking Hermione’s frizzly hair. She leaned into the touch and he felt someone’s eyes on him. Glancing down at Cho and Cedric, he realised Cedric was awake. However, he still appeared exhausted. “How are you feeling?”

“Thank you,” Cedric said - without a thought of registration to what he asked. “Thanks, Harry…”

“Hey,” he began. “You would’ve done the same to Hermione or I. It’s certainly not something to get your mind caught up on. I would’ve done it to any of you guys because we’re allies. Now, how are you feeling?”

“Uh, better.”

“You look like shit.”

Cedric frowned at him, bothered by his answer. “Thanks for that.”

“No problem, now we’re going to need to find a source of fresh water somewhere. The sea is salt water so we cannot drink that if we want to live. There is most likely a pond or small body of water somewhere that we’ll be able to drink from, but there won’t be something big I wouldn’t have thought. Rain water,” he debates. “Hard to catch though unless we all strip naked to catch it with our clothes.” Harry turned to the trees. “These trees, what do you know about them?”

“It depends on what type of tree. Sometimes they produce water.”

“Ah, a device we’ll need to sponsor us. Oh victors, oh fellow friends. Please sponsor us a drinking water device.” He calls out to the audience who was bound to get a kick out of the ridiculousness Harry was spouting. Cedric rolled his eyes. He told him, “I think the term is

a spile."

"Okay then, a spile please."

"Harry," Hermione groaned awake. "Please - shut the fuck up."

"That I can do."

The forest went silent, both Cedric and Hermione going back asleep, and Harry began to become bored. Then, the Capitol's theme began and he was allowed to wake them up. Hermione groaned, narrowing her eyes up at the sky to all the people they could note who died. Borgin from District 3. Lymit Tydal from District 5, Cali Perth from District 6, Bronx Teal from District 6, Emmer Teff from District 9, Acker Monterosa from District 11. 6 dead. 18 remaining. Cedric groaned and rolled back to sleep. Harry stayed up and Cho went back to bed. Hermione laid next to him, looking up to the sky. "I thought more people were going to die."

"Sometimes it's more, sometimes it's less. Most people die the first night though."

"It really wasn't a blood bath."

"Hermione," Harry blinked at her. "You nearly died. So did Cedric. There could've been eight deaths." She paused before narrowing her eyebrows at that. He put his engagement ring back on with his brace after flexing his wrist around a couple of times. The two of them stargazed before hearing the sound of gongs ring out into the arena. Hermione sat up instantly.

One, two, three, four…

Five, six, seven, eight…

Nine, ten, eleven, twelve…

He counted.

"Twelve gongs?" Hermione raised her eyebrows.

"Appears that way," he said. "Midnight - perhaps?"

"Could be…" Hermione began to start theorising what it could mean as he laid on the ground, basking the cool soil. It was beginning to get colder as he laid there, happy. "Go to bed, Harry. I'll wake up Cedric or Cho when I'm ready to sleep." He allows her to do that and falls

asleep. The cold air was refreshing as his body sunk into the ground like the air was a blanket wrapping itself around him.

Narcissa packed up her things and met-up with Lucius. Married and content with her husband, she asked him if they would be able to move to a District. When Lucius asked why, she told him that Tom was about to do something stupid and wonderful - that they were all going to regret it if they stayed in the Capitol. Both of them knowing how Tom was, they packed up their things. They were going to take the first car they could get their hands on and drive out of there. Andromeda was in the plan, she knew, somehow - she had to be involved.

If she wasn't, Narcissa wouldn't think her life was in danger like her family's. Lucius had convinced Mathis to pack his bags under the suspicion they were going on a holiday with Bella, but she wasn't sure how she was going to be able to convince her parents. Lucius' was a part of the Hunger Games so they couldn't leave no matter what, and Mathis' hated him, but Bella's and hers could leave. They needed to somehow get it into their heads that they were going.

With everything packed, Narcissa stood outside the car door with Lucius in the driver's seat, Mathis and Bella in the back. She glanced at her parents who were standing there. "You two should come with us." Narcissa told them. Her mother kissed her cheek.

"Don't worry about us dear, we'll see each other again - I'm sure."

Her father hugged her, "just make sure to keep us updated how your trip goes."

"I love you guys," she told them, knowing she was about to cry.

Her mother hugged her and Lucius told her to get into the car. Waving them both a goodbye once she got into the passenger's seat, she wiped her stray tears away from her face. She turned to her sister and told the two in the back that they were heading to District 4 where the weather would be hotter and they'd get to visit the beach there. If anything, they were heading to District 13. Andromeda gave Narcissa the location and they were going to try and get there inconspicuously.

Putting on music, the four exited the Capitol at the wrong exit - Narcissa and Lucius not saying anything as they drove between where District 9 and District 2 would be located. The freeway had nobody on

it as they continued to drive. The music relaxed them and Bella put on a facial behind her, Mathis reading. If nothing appeared wrong, they weren't going to question it. Lucius and Narcissa shared a glance, sighing. They continued to drive — the navigation telling them they had two days without issue to get to the unmapped area they were heading to. They would have to go in-between District 3 and District 8, then head past District 12 where they would make it to 13.

They had long days in front of them without getting caught.

Lucius put an arm onto hers and told her to rest, that she would need it.

Narcissa, with the comfort of her husband's words, went to sleep.

———

Sirius was not having a good day.

For the past year, he's been in-contact with the rebellion group in the Capitol and the Districts, trying to find out how he can best help with the uprisings and soon-to-be rebellion: only to find out that the rebellion leader in the Capitol is Harry's boyfriend. He was bothered by the kid's stupidity and riskiness but accepted it for how it was. However, he had two children in the back of his truck, and a woman in his passenger's seat. Amelia Bones who told him that her niece, Susan Bones, the unforgettable Career of the 74th Annual Hunger Games with his godson. His day wasn't going great, and she told him that she was heading to District 13 when she saw him.

As a woman from District 2, she knew Lily and James from when they were training peacekeepers, and him from when he joined their joyride. She was a lot older than him, in spite of this, a lot of memories were resurfacing that he didn't want to remember. Radian and Iris were fifteen years-old and twelve years-old. He had two troublesome, traumatised kids that were nothing but scared of what might happen to them.

Radian, the bravest, spoke up. "So your godson killed our brother?"

Sirius shrugged his shoulders. "He gave your brother mercy."

Iris, the strongest, glared at her brother. "Silver was dying anyway, Rad, he did give him mercy."

"He said in his speech that he was weak - and that he didn't help him

at all." Radian crossed his arms, glaring at Sirius, who felt too old. For the past eighteen years he's been looking after three, and now four kids. He's now looking after another two who lost both their father and brother, and possibly now their mother. Esteven told Sirius to look after them for her if she were to die but he wasn't going to allow it: she was going to survive or else these kids were going to become orphans like Harry, Nathaniel, Abelene, and Sibyl - and what he recently figured out, his boyfriend and rebel leader, Tom.

If not, Nathaniel, Abelene, and Sibyl will look after them like they did with Harry, themselves, and him. They were a strong trio, those kids. Nathaniel will teach Radian the ability to trust and his girls will teach Iris how to find peace. These kids deserve it but for Esteven, he was going to try his hardest to give them everything that they needed. Meaning reluctant respect in the conversations he had with them even if they weren't the kindest to him. However, Amelia turned to Radian. "Harry said Lux didn't want to be his District partner so much so she ran off the first chance she got. Nobody smart would've tried to team up or save your brother. He was weak, and Harry was smart. I'll give it to you Sirius," she cracked a beer open, "you raised a clever boy."

"I began raising him when he was eleven. Before that, he raised himself with his now-boyfriend in an orphanage in the Capitol. The whole reason why he now lived in District 12 is because he got in contact with me and we communicated for me to take him to live there. Harry was always clever, and I'm not going to take credit for that. It's natural to be born from his parents."

"You mean… he doesn't have parents?" Radian asked, voice small.

"Lily and James died protecting their son, Harry, in the Capitol. I took him to the orphanage after they passed… so no. He's never had parents that he remembers."

"They might've been smart but they were also stupid." Amelia rolls her eyes, drinking from the can. "Lily was at the top of her studies and James was also surprisingly bright even if he was boyishly stupid." She told the two children in the back. "Harry got both aspects of his parents' brains; both the clever, swift wit from his father, and the genius creativity from his mother; but he also inherited the goodness that painted them both dead. How that boy isn't dead is beyond me."

"Hey," Sirius glared at her. "I do not want to discuss my grandson's death, thank you."

“Nor the Hunger Games,” Iris declared. “It’s quite off-putting.”

He accepted the terms and conditions.

Amelia had dark hair like her niece but had dark blue eyes. Susan had more sky-like eyes that glimmered whilst in the sun. Sirius could see the resemblance between the two women. She was forty-five, he found out, which must’ve meant her brother was significantly older, around his late twenties when he had Susan. Apparently, he died from a bullet before she was born - and her mother died when she was five in an explosive accident. She took care of Susan when she was only in her early twenties when she met James and Lily, teaching at the Peacekeeping Academy where Sirius was training. Admittedly, she was a badass - taking care of both a classroom and child like that when she was young. Susan must’ve been her only relative left alive which was why she was pursuing District 13 on her own.

She pulled out a cigarette and began to smoke. “You’re godson is a wild one.”

“I think Tom is a bad influence.”

“Ah?” She laughed. “No, he isn’t. Harry’s got Jame’s blood — definitely the bad influence.”

Iris agreed with Amelia. “He was the President’s successor before they met again. Now, as you said, he’s the rebel leader in the Capitol, trying to protect his boyfriend. To me it sounds as if Harry is the bad influence but also that Tom’s making it worse for himself because he cares.” She turns to her older brother. “I wish I could be in-love like that.”

Amelia laughed harder, turning back to the kids. “Don’t let that love fool you, kids. Both of them want love. Of course, they’re going to do everything in-order to protect each other and their ability to love them back.” She rolled down her window and flicked her cigarette ashes outside. Amelia put the bud to her lips again before blowing the smoke out. “You might’ve raised a fighter, Sirius, but at the end of the day - all the boy wants is love. Tom is the perfect man for him.”

“They’re engaged, Amelia.” Sirius rolls his eyes. “I don’t have much say regardless.”

“Cute. Gosh, you’re so feisty. Time hasn’t done anything to you at all.”

Radian glared at them. “Stop spitting in each other’s mouths.”

Iris glared in Radian's direction. "I was about to say that!"

"Children." Sirius groaned. "I'm never having kids."

"How you raised four is a miracle to me - although you only had one of James."

"Lily was a troublemaker too, I hope you know."

"You could never say anything about Lily that would make me think that she was more troublesome than James and you. You together had like forty detentions and suspensions together, than Lily ever had. She only had like two, and perhaps it was because she was smarter than you two combined." Amelia pointed her index finger at him. "Your luck ran out."

Sirius ignored her comment and stopped when he saw a service station. Stepping out, he wore his Capitol clothing - knowing the fashions even twenty-years later. He wouldn't be asked if he was a District citizen or a Capitol one. Filling up the truck, he went to go pay and buy food, not being questioned once. Returning to the car, he put all the snacks and lollies and sodas in the back for the kids to enjoy, handing Amelia another packet of cigarettes and a case of beer. She rose the cigarette to him in a 'cheers' manner.

He also bought water so even had something healthy to drink on the way to District 13. Once far enough from the station, he pulled to the side of the road and the kids took turns going to the bathroom. He wasn't going to be seen with them in their District clothes, ready to be caught. Amelia said she'd be okay when he asked if she wanted to go to the bathroom. Sirius rolled his eyes and drove off once they returned to their seats.

This was going to be a long car ride.

Hermione tapped him awake. "We got a spile, Harry."

Opening his eyes lazily, turning his attention onto her, he slowly registered what she said. Blinking and wiping the sweat from his forehead, he glanced to where she turned to. Water, he gasped, crawling before running forward to where it was coming from. Hermione laughed and Cedric let Harry dip his head underneath the water that was sputtering out of the tree. He lapped it up and felt immediately better than he had in a long time. The water splashed

across his face and he sighed before letting the tributes from 4 have their go. He leaned against the tree, relaxing. Hermione appeared refreshed as if she had drank the water for a while. “District 12, Harry.”

“Remus?” He tilted his head. “Damn, that man is good when he isn’t on the alcohol.”

“Yes, luckily that means we’re not going to die yet.” Hermione said, crossing her arms together. She appeared sad for a moment. “You were right. He is solely my sponsor. How did you convince him to sponsor me and not you?”

“Guilt-tripping him,” Harry shrugged his shoulders. “He didn’t sponsor Sedge so…”

“You’re a bad man, Harry.”

He grinned widely, before winking at her, “then think of yourself as my accomplice.”

The group took turns drinking the water and letting it wet their faces, as if they were in some kind of erotica. He chuckled to himself at the joke but realistically, he did consider the thought that Tom might be recording him - even if he was too deadly stressed about trying to save them—him, went unsaid. Yeah, Tom would never do that, but he wondered how many people besides Tom (who would be the only acceptable one being shown that kind of version of himself) was recording them, and not only him. Hermione, Cedric, Cho—it disgusted him.

Regardless, he continued to drink the water because it was water. He wasn’t going to let people’s disgusting sexual fantasies stop him from trying to survive. Once everyone seemed to have their fair share, Cedric, Cho, and Hermione all went to sleep. Harry stayed up, cleaning his face and drinking more water. Additionally, he glanced around for something he could make and eat. Climbing up high in a tree with all the practice that he’s had, he grabbed down a fruit. Grabbing his knife and opening it up, he glared at what he found inside. It was rotten to its core. “Bitches,” he said out-loud, hoping the game makers had heard him. “What kind of Games is this?”

“Wanting us to die of hunger? Sure it’s called the ‘Hunger Games’ but that’s quite boring.” Harry kicked the fruit away from him and crossed his arms, pouting. If the fruit that they found was rotten, then the animals were probably bad to eat as well. Meaning, sponsorship food.

“Hey,” he said to the sky, “send Hermione, or Cedric, or Cho food please. Thank you.”

Harry sat back down underneath the spile and began to wash his armpits of sweat, finding a large leaf that produced a soap-like liquid once broken, and washed his underarms, legs, face, and hair with it. He washed it and felt refreshed. Happy and content, he took the spile and clipped it to his brace so it was always on him in case something happened.

Sitting, waiting and keeping watch with a knife, he became more tired with every minute that he stayed up for. He definitely had not slept that long, and Cedric and Cho hadn’t taken their fair night watch yet. He glared at them before sighing, they were going to protect them both, he knew so it was only fair they get a goodnight’s sleep to do so. Half-in and out of consciousness, he faintly looks at the distance before yawning. A fog-like cloud was heading towards him and he was becoming even more tired…

Then, he reached out for the fog and screamed. “Ahhh!”

He hissed and everyone around him began to wake up. It was poisonous.

“Everyone get up, get up!” He immediately stook them awake from behind him. “The fog’s poison,” he told them from where Hermione and Cedric were beginning to stand and look behind him. Cho yawned and immediately widened her eyes when he saw it. “Let’s go! Let’s go!” He chanted, beginning to dash away from the fog. Hermione followed closely behind him with Cedric and Cho following along. “Come on, let’s go—“

Cho screamed from behind and Cedric picked her up, gritting his teeth.

They rushed through the forest, getting more covered in boils as they tried to race away from the fog. Harry tripped over onto his face and yelped, getting up immediately but being bombarded by fog. At the pain that rippled through him, he kept running forward and away from it but everything was becoming too awful to handle. He didn’t know how long he ran for with his nerves shutting down on him, or how far they had gone but he ripped over again and fell into a pond of sorts. Cedric, Cho, and Hermione followed after — all of them hissing in relief as the water washed away all their pains. Harry was shaking, covered in boils as he laid there, washing his body with the water.

Laying his head back, he began to catch his breath and shivered. He felt so sick.

And Harry vomited in the water.

Hermione headed over to where he was laying in his own vomit, but she held his hair out of his face as he spewed his guts out. He whimpered, Hermione wiping the boils from his face as they dispersed from his body. “Are you alright?” She hissed when she felt his forehead. “You feel hotter, Harry. You might be catching a fever.”

It took a minute when Cedric noticed monkeys in the tree lining. Turning his gaze to the monkeys who were seven feet from Hermione and him, he gulped, pointing his knife at them - Hermione, her axe. “Are these guys lookin’ friendly to you as they are to me, ‘cause they’re looking like we’re food right now…”

“Um, I think friendly is putting that too lightly, Harry.” Hermione glares at the monkeys.

“Killer monkeys, let’s brawl!”

“Arrogant little—“ Hermione sighed, “okay, let’s fight these guys and hopefully live.”

The monkeys jumped at them and Harry thought they were so much like spiders, they could be called monkey spiders. He stabbed and thrashed all of them that came across his path with emphasis, fury, and distraction as he protected his allies backs’. He was swift, quick, and the monkeys appeared pissed off at him the most as he was swinging around the trees as stomping their itty-bitty heads in. He used his mobility to fight in the air and acted like one of them to his succession. As a result, their attention was more on him than his allies.

Did he ask why they were pissed off before?—perhaps it was because of him, entirely, and there didn’t need to be an extended answer to that question. Harry liked asking questions he already knew the answer to because it made him sound extra clever, and dumb, and irritating and that made him more enthralled. He stabbed, knowing these weren’t humans. He rushed at them, knowing these weren’t tributes. He yanked them, knowing they were out to kill him.

Unfortunately, as much as this was his element, it wasn’t the others’. They appeared to be struggling, even with Harry taking on the extra baggage with double the amount of monkeys. He grumbled, but

accepted the challenge, helping them and stabbing their little brains out. Then, out of nowhere a monkey tried to jump onto Hermione and kill her when a tribute—out of nowhere took the hit for her. His eyes' widened, the four (and now five) trying to get to the beach as quickly as possible because it seemed like everything inside the jungle was out to get them, and the tribute was bleeding and quick. He couldn't recognise them.

However, despite Hermione dragging the tribute to the beach, another tribute popped out of nowhere and began killing the monkeys to help Harry and Cedric. Unfortunately, the man - he presumed from his build - wasn't able to help before tripping over and being overwhelmed by monkeys. They gasped at the scene and killed the monkeys until they were able to drag him to the water along with the women. Two cannons went off simultaneously.

"Who were they?" Harry asked. They were covered in mud and sand.

"Dyneema Kelsi and Muff Moire from District 8." Cedric answered, upset and shocked.

Cho pushed their bodies further into the water and they let them float. A hovercraft appeared and lifted them out of the water. Harry gave Hermione the spile. Sitting down in the water, he laid his head back onto the sand. Cedric was beside him and they were all cooling down from the energy the attack brought upon them. "That was horrific," he said, closing his eyes. "One minute fog, another monkeys, another—their deaths. I think the forest is a bad idea."

Hermione brought Harry water with a leaf and he drank it. She touched his right shoulder and Harry hissed in pain, glancing down to realise how much he was bleeding. "I think a monkey might've nicked you, Hary."

"I didn't even notice…" he grumbled, yawning. "I think this headache, fever thing is fuckin' me up real bad." She touched his forehead again, sighing, and Cedric took a moment to touch his forehead after Hermione lifted up her hand, hissing at the heat that was lingering on his forehead.

Cedric said lowly, "that's bad."

Harry hummed. "This water is nice though."

"You stay here," Hermione left him. Cedric stood up and Harry felt well-protected to shut his eyes and bask in the morning sun that was

rising in the arena. He felt his body collapse at the exhaustion he felt and didn't wake up until later that morning. When he did, he saw his suit was hanging from his shoulders again - Hermione must've done it as he laid in the sand, feeling yuck. Sitting up and sticking his tongue out in disgust, he wet his face and washed his hair, getting rid of all the sand that was stuck there. Or maybe not, he realised when it was still there.

Great, he made it worse.

Looking at what Cedric, Cho, and Hermione were doing - he noticed Cedric teaching Hermione how to catch fish in the deeper parts of the water. Beside him, Cho was slicing open the fish they had already caught. She looked at him and passed him a leaf with a fish on it. "Here," she began. "We wanted you to eat earlier whilst the fish was extremely fresh but your temperature was still high. We thought it was better to let you sleep-in."

He took the fish and began to eat it without complaint.

Then, she passed him another. "No," he shook his head. "I couldn't."

"Don't worry about it, Harry - we got some berries and fruits from the jungle back there that we could find near the shore so it's all mixed with nice combinations. And we've already eaten," she smiles. "Eat."

"You're too kind."

He ate the fresh fish and relaxed on the shore, noticing the leaves that were wrapped around his bleeding wound. It was another scar to add to the list, he thought without care. It was only getting bigger to his feet. Placing the bone back on the leave, he stood up and headed over more into the water. There, he began to swim and really refresh as the heat had come back in full throttle again. Hermione and Cedric watched him as he swam towards him. He turned onto his back and began to say, "I'm a little fish. Come catch me."

Hermione laughed and picked him up in his floppy suit. "How are you feeling?"

He laid on his back, floating. "I dunno. Better I suppose?—what about you guys?"

"I was teaching Hermione how to fish, she's quite good at it."

Harry nodded his head at that information. "Hermione is quite good at

a lot of things. Definitely victor worthy, I personally think." He closed his eyes and just sat there floating. "You guys keep catching fish, I'm going to lay low for a bit." She touched his forehead and accepted his proposition, still apparently not happy at his temperature.

"Okay, Harry. We'll wake you up once we're done."

"Sounds good to me."

Chapter End Notes

Again, just wanted to say it again;
Free Palestine **P S** donate $.50, $1, $5 to any go-fund-me organisations that you can!!
I'm not going to continuously say it because I think you get the point, but, nobody is going to do it but us.
Just wanted to spread the word--especially because of the content within this fanfic and how it relates to our current world & political climate. Please do what you can, that's all.

Next chapter, "happiness & Suburban Legends"
These next lot of chapters are all going to be heavy in content so I'll keep reminding you just so you know.
P S

happiness & Suburban Legends

Chapter Notes

Posted: 18th of May, 2024
soccer + sissy's bday tomorrow so posts are today for that reason

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Cedric picked Harry up and placed him onto the beach where Cho had put down leaves. Hermione stares at him, crossing her arms with nerves. The Hunger Games were everything that she had expected them to be: traumatising, frightening, and terrorising - but there were other aspects to the Games she could appreciate now what going through them was like. It must've not been like this for Harry's previous Games, but the environment the other victors had created was nothing like she saw on screen. These victors had all experienced the worst of the Games: they weren't going to try and make others' lives hell for the sake of it.

The victors were all weird in their own ways, but weirdly, Harry was both the most weird and normal to her. He's always been weird in ways that she couldn't understand: the way he behaved, the way he excelled, and the way he demonstrated his potential - but she would agree - he was like everyone else when it came down to his trauma responses. Abnormal but perfectly normal at the same time. He was curled up on his side, as if he was a small child, trying to take up the least amount of space. It didn't even appear to be a Hunger Games side effect.

From a child, Harry was traumatised, she knew.

Without parents, growing up in an orphanage, escaping at eleven, returning to the Districts where the Hunger Games were targeted at them - and accepting that: definitely had an impact on him growing up. But he was kind. Hermione met Harry at school when he was eleven and he had no friends. Despite this, he always smiled and spoke to people as if they were the best person in the world. He always saw the good in others.

He took chances and opportunities given to him. He excelled more at general knowledge than Hermione because of his Capitol schooling, and it bothered her, so much so that it drove her spree for wanting to consume more knowledge even more. So through spite, she began the

smartest, and she was content with her title but Harry never changed and people still loved him more than her. She wasn't jealous, she would admit, but how people were around him was as if they were free - and in some ways, it was the same with her. He was freeing and she knew everyone else felt envious at one point or another about how naturally gifted he was with his ability to make people feel comfortable and loved.

Another part of Hermione knew this 'giving nature' of his, wasn't out of the kindness of his heart either. He didn't want to be abandoned again. He wanted love, he wanted to be loved. He liked when people liked him because it meant they were less likely to leave him, and she knew why Tom and Harry loved each other. Because they were there for each other when no one else was. During the early stages of development where trauma affected children the most; they were there and nobody would ever understand the bond they have for each other. Their love would never be matched, no matter how likely two people are to be soulmates.

Hermione was jealous of that too - but she loved Harry.

Like a sister, she adored everything about him. Like his rival, she wanted to become better because of him. He challenged her like no other and that was special. He taught her things, like medicine, and different plants, and the best ways to bargain with business - because he just instinctively knew - and was born more socially inclined than her. He was popular and for good reason. His innate ability to want to save others - again, another trauma response, taught her a lot of things about people in general.

She overanalysed people because there weren't enough books on knowledge that she could consume without knowing if it was propaganda or not. But his knowledge felt like fact more than theory. Medicines, he created, concocted. Business propositions, he set up, worked. People he became friends with, worked with him better than any other - because he was able to communicate a means of trust between them. He was awe-inspiring, and a sad story. Once she pulled back the layers and saw who he was on the inside, she knew he was destined for a hard life no matter what the situation was.

When he wouldn't open the doors to his bedroom, when he drank heavily, when he escaped and hid so nobody knew where he was, when he didn't eat or say anything. When he lost his natural nack for smiling without a fault, was when she knew, the moment he became a victor - and being a victor wasn't a life easy for anyone. But he still

persisted with hope and strength. And it was irritating to her, but she can explain. It was irritating to her because she wanted him to succeed and be happy and live a good life, but she was still jealous of his strength. His willpower. His recklessness and devotion - to saving people. Does that make her a good person? No, perhaps not. Does that make her human? Yes, but still - she knew it's not the nicest thing to say about someone who she always adored, but that's who Harry was and it did bug her.

She wasn't a liar.

She was blunt and arrogant and persistent and opinionated. Hermione knew that even things did bug her, even if they were no one else's fault but her own. He was a natural. He could sing, he could dance, he could make crowds happy. He could heal people. He could teach others. He could make a child stop crying. She wanted to do all of those things, like him, because she looked up to him, so when he asked her if she wanted to help him - she was willing to jump at the chance to prove herself. In a world with limited opportunities, she was willing to do anything to shine.

But even the one-liners, the small remarks, and comments that were brilliant bugged her, but she wasn't going to say anything about it. She would have her time to be brilliant too. Harry would still be her friend, she would still be happy. This war was her battleground; from studying human behaviour for long enough, she would be best capable at helping and assisting, and Harry was right. He was right in picking her - so she was going to make sure she didn't fuck this up.

Which meant, saving Harry no matter the costs.

Hermione knew Tom Riddle from the Hunger Games she watched when she was younger. Admittedly, she even had a crush on him at one point because he was so handsome and in such a luxurious position to lead people - she wanted to be like him and with him. But after growing out of that, and understanding, and knowing how better fitted Harry was for that lonesome boy - she knew that Tom's heart was Harry's. And if anything made a difference in this war, it was going to be the both of them. Which meant, Harry needed to be alive for Tom's sanity, safe.

Everyone knew, it meant saving Harry, no matter the costs - but that still made her jealous.

But, he was her brother and she was his sister - not by blood but by

love.

Neither had any siblings so they could understand each other like this: jealousy, hate, and connection. Hermione knew Harry felt it about her, so she could feel it about him. But at the end of the day, they'd still love each other, and want to care for each other.

From the knowledge that Hermione knew from Harry, she began to care for his wound. She brought salt water and stopped the bleeding with leaves, tightly connecting them together so they would be able to wrap around his arm and cover the area. Then, underneath, she placed more leaves saturated in salt water and tied it together like a bandage. Cedric and Cho appeared bewildered at her ability to do this. She sighed, willing to admit it was Harry's invention with the softer leaves back at 12 when he taught her how to do it in case they weren't bandages around. Cedric was conflicted. "He always seems to know things, doesn't he?"

"Tell me about it," Hermione frowns before fiddling with his necklace he gave her. "He knows a lot but likes to downplay it like nothing - it's quite annoying."

"Like how he knew how to swim?" Cho said. "I found it extremely surprising how proficient he was. He got to the cornucopia before Cedric." Her boyfriend nodded his head and Hermione took a seat beside Harry, looking at the sleeping boy.

She shrugged her shoulders. "He's definitely something I'll give you that."

They spent a good duration of the morning, relaxing after their hectic night. Harry slept and was tanning so much so he was burning. His cheeks were dusted pink and sand was all over his face, Hermione grabbed one of the leaves that produced a slippery soap-like lotion and applied it to his face. He was exhausted, his body burning up. Hermione woke him up after another thirty minutes of sleeping, needing to wet him in the water so he wouldn't cook and fry his brain. Placing him underneath the branches of the small hut-like build the two District 4 tributes had created, they waited around for allies they could potentially see roaming around the beach.

Hermione fed Harry some more water and fish before he went back to sleep. She sat on the sand and glanced over to the cornucopia where Victor would be, flushing. Hermione knew she liked him when she first saw him on the train. He was muscular and was uniquely

attractive, unlike Tom - or Hero - or Cedric - anyone else she knew who was model attractive. At first, she was afraid Victor was going to be everything that she knew herself was. Arrogant, selfish, judgmental, and opinionated, that he wouldn't like her.

But, he was everything she could've dreamed of.

Kind, warmhearted, passionate, and soft-spoken, he was the type of man that knew how to support his women if he ever wanted one. Hermione knew a lot about societal standards, about what was deemed accepted and what wasn't. There were notions about age-gap couples in the Capitol and not so much in the Districts, all for good reasons, she knew, but it didn't apply to them. Hermione was smarter and more mature than him. Perhaps, she's wanting to be, but there would be no man that would be able to match her intelligence - and be able to satisfy her. So she'd much rather someone who would be everything she would want. Even if he was a bit older.

Although, she kind of almost knew, Victor wasn't going to touch her or do anything about the connection she felt between them because of the age gap. He was that kind of man. He liked her, wanted her, and that was wrong in his eyes because she was still young. She could understand but really did want him. Harry was encouraging nonetheless because he could understand. Like Hermione was going back and forth about before; they had their times where they were helpful to one another, where they completely ignored the other — more Harry than her, and where they weren't close — more Hermione than Harry, but it always came back around in a circle.

Hermione knitted her eyebrows, conflicted. They perhaps shouldn't be friends but Hermione wouldn't know who else to go to for the entertainment and socialisation like Harry would give her. And she might die here, so it's not as if she's complaining because she literally has no one else.

Harry made friends with Hermione after years of conflict from her end.

He never did anything wrong - it was entirely her, but he still wanted to be friends, and so he eventually got his way but sometimes she feels as if she's the one doing things wrong. Hermione walks up to the water and dunks her head into the water. Harry didn't deserve any of this. She needed to get her act together and save him for once, which felt weird because he was always doing it. Tom told her the plan like he did to the others.

Once her head returned from the water, she heard shouting.

“Esteven? Ilex?” She heard Cedric shout.

Turning her head back to where Cedric and Cho were running off to, she watched as two tributes - completely drenched in blood, came stumbling from the tree lines. Harry was still knocked out as he laid there on the leaves, so Hermione went over to him to protect him from anything that might come out to attack the recovering tribute. She watched, seated beside Harry, as the two victors were washed in the water of all the blood that they were covered in, and returned back to where Hermione and Harry were. Esteven glanced down at him. Hermione ignored the small part of her brain that told her that she would never be good enough. “What happened to him?”

“Monkeys,” she pointed her thumb to behind them. “A fever.”

“Shit,” Esteven said. “That’s not good at all.”

“I’m hoping it’ll come down with rest but knowing how unpredictable his luck is, I don’t think it will. It’ll only get worse and,” she sighs, “he will keep trying to fight even when he’s not supposed to. Either way, I think we all know now not to go into the forest because it’s a bad idea.”

“Yes,” Ilex sneered. “It was bloody fantastic - no pun intended.”

“So… where’s Atwood and Borgin? I saw his name in the sky last night,” referring to Borgin. Hermione was a little heartbroken over Borgin’s death. He was a smart man who liked to tell her about the things he created. Esteven appeared heartbroken over his death as well, taking a deep breath in before explaining how he hit the forcefield and instantly died when the blood rain hit them. And Ilex said that Atwood choked on the blood so much he wasn’t able to breathe. The two girls survive by hiding under trees and rushing towards where they came from: the beach.

When they realised there was fresh water, they went over to the spile and stayed there for a good hour, drinking all the water that they could engulf themselves with before they were entirely blissed out as if the water was some organismic experience. Esteven began to play with Harry’s hair as he slept, and said to Hermione. “Sometimes he reminds me of Silver. The things I wished Silver was, and the good things about the world like him.”

“What he said was harsh with his speech,” Hermione commented.

“How can you still like him?”

Esteven glared at her. “He may have put my son to rest, Hermione Granger, but he isn’t cruel. He wasn’t cruel to Alistar either, knowing what he did to those tributes. He saw what all of them were at their cores before he was a victor. They were children, first and foremost, and that they were scared. You may have volunteered yourself, but you will never understand the terrifying prospect of being chosen for the Hunger Games.”

“I—“

“I do not want to speak to you, but for him, I must.”

“I killed seven tributes in my Hunger Games, Ms. Granger. Harry killed two through mercy - and assisted killing one through fighting for his own life. He never killed out of malice or lust for blood. He was chosen like the rest of the tributes to fight. And surprisingly, he made allies in people: the tributes: the now dead: those children. My son. Those two children from District 10, who were Emmeline and Newt’s tributes, were able to find peace in the arenas before their deaths. Some aren’t that lucky. When I heard his speech at District 10, I knew he was special, not only as a victor but as a child. He was willing to give up his life for his ally, Ladislao, when he hardly knew the boy. I watched the Games, Ms. Granger, don’t tell me what I can or cannot like about him.” She touched his braid for a moment before standing up.

She gave her a sour expression. “Imelda and Harry were butting heads. Imelda couldn’t care enough for Harry because she loved her district partner unconditionally. Did that change him? Did that make him leave her? No. Ladislao connected them both, and like what Harry said - they both agreed they would give up their lives for him. He wasn’t even his own district partner, but he cared so much for another person he would do that. It’s not even that he didn’t care about Imelda either, he got along with her after he proved himself to her. They got along after that whole piss-incident; but I don’t think Imelda, if she had the skills that Harry did in that arena, would give up medical supplies for someone that wasn’t even her own district partner.”

“I’m not sure we watched the same Games, Ms. Granger, but Harry had nothing once he finished bandaging her wounds. No gauze, no bandages, no anything until Ladislao pulled out supplies from Valor’s pack. Then, he healed himself. He persisted, and every one of those

kids: more or less, were affected by him. So yes, what he said about my son was a little harsh but that's what is good about Harry. Even though he saw all those imperfections - where I loved him too much and taught him the good of the world, Harry was able to see the good in my son. Able to understand him for who he was and is: a good person who didn't deserve the end he received," she glared at her like she was about to murder her.

"You might be his friend - best friend, or whoever you might've been before Harry mingled in whatever business he did to make you the volunteer; but his judgement is the only reason why I haven't killed you yet." Esteven crossed her arms, fury in all the body language that she could sense from her. "You're everything I don't like. Accept that and we'll get along."

She watched her walk off to the water and sit in it.

Hermione felt as if all the air was taken out of her lungs.

Hermione sensed Harry stirring from where he laid, groaning.

———

Harry yawned, rubbing his eyes.

He felt sunkissed and warm as he touched his cheek, gawking. He turns to his left to find Hermione sitting next to him, appearing kind of bothered by the look of her face. Harry couldn't tell what it was from, despite this. "I feel so warm, what happened?" She shrugs her shoulders as if it wasn't that important. Although, she told him that he was out in the sun too long and he was sunburnt. He frowned and stood up, about to go into the ocean when he realised Esteven and Ilex were a part of their group. He gaped at the two of them before grinning, happy. "What are you two doing here?"

"Ah," Esteven softly smiled in his direction but her smile didn't meet her eyes. "We were in a different section that was entirely made-up of blood rain so we had to rush to the beach to get out of it. Borgin hit a forcefield and Atwood choked on the blood so much it drowned him," she gave him a brief overview and his expression became dimmer, understanding why she wasn't as happy as she once was.

He frowned, sympathetic. "I'm sorry for your loss. I know how much they both meant to you."

"Thanks kid," Ilex said simply before turning her head back to the

water.

“Thank you, Harry,” Esteven pursed her lips, body relaxing. “How are you feeling?”

“Much better — I still don’t feel very well though.”

She gestured to the water, “come. Let’s swim. I think Cedric and Cho are getting lunch for us so let’s just relax whilst we can for a moment.” Harry floated in the water, closing his eyes as it touched his ears and wet his hair. All the sands slowly came undone from him as it floated back down to the ground due to gravity. Esteven splashed Ilex and Ilex fought back with double the force as the women had fun in the sea. Harry didn’t imagine they got to sea it much, even if it was in an arena. Hermione sat on the sand, thoughtful.

Cho dripped a little bit of water over his forehead. “How are you?”

“I feel sooo good.”

“What about your skin?” Cho questioned. “We got a sponsor.”

“Huh?” Harry sat up, glancing at the cylinder she held in her hands. Cedric applied the cream to his hands and face before passing it on to Cho who began to apply it to herself. She then applied it to his face and arms. Then, she left to go give some to Hermione. His skin felt less tingly as he floated, the ointment doing its thing as he listened to Cedric stabbed the fish in the water.

Cedric told him that he caught enough fish for them to eat so that if he wanted to join them, that there would be food waiting for him. Harry hummed and the victor went back to prepare the food. Harry laid in the water for a long time, never feeling so hot and bothered, even whilst in the water. He floated, as if he was in the middle of nowhere, not in the Hunger Games; not anywhere in the world where anyone could find him. By the time he got out, his fingers were prunes.

Hermione applied more of the ointment to his face and back when he took off his suit, all of the victors staring at the grossly decorated back in boils. Cedric tilted his head, confused. “When we touched that fresh water spot, most of our boils disappeared. I wonder why yours hasn’t left?”

Harry shrugged his shoulders. “I vomited, remember? I was only on my stomach before the mutts began to attack us.” He almost moaned

when the ointment covered his back and relaxed all negativity lingering there. He laid on his stomach on the leaves the victors left out and almost began to sleep again. Esteven passed him fish Cedric and Cho had sliced up.

“Come on, Harry, you’ve got to eat.”

He rolled his eyes. “Alright, but then I’m sleeping.”

Esteven smiled and watched him eat before grabbing her own slice of leaf and eating the fish on it. He fell asleep and snoozed softly underneath the shady tree before he heard a loud crash begin to overlap the arena. Immediately, he had his knife out, standing up and pointing it at a large spot across the arena from them. All of the tributes were staring at the sound in shock as it overpowered through, a cannon sounding - a large wave hitting the water across from them. Picking up their things, they began to move their stuff back as the wave crashed by their feet. The hovercraft picked up the dead tribute. “What the hell?” Cho glared at the wave. “This is weird.”

“Huh?” Harry tilted his head at the arena.

Fog… Monkeys… Blood rain… a Wave… this appeared to be on purpose, he found.

Twelve slices of an arena, cut up almost like a clock… Harry’s eyes widened. He knew the arena felt fishy! And if the Head Game Maker made it purposely like this, then that means it has a meaning to do with the rebel plan. Deciding that anyway, they were going to find out, he said. “It’s a clock.” Esteven turned to him, raising her eyebrow. “What do you mean?”

“It’s a clock. Twice slices, made up of twenty-four tributes. Twelve sections, each which happen at the hour they occur at. I don’t know what those times were, but they must’ve happened together at night. Blood rain first, fog, then monkeys.” He points at the rest of the segments. “I’m not sure what happens in those ones, but that one must be a deadly wave.”

All of the tributes gaped at him.

“You really think so?” Hermione asked, the only sane one apparently.

“Yes.” Harry nodded his head. “I thought it was weird when I was swimming to the rocks. Each rocky line cuts the arena up. It’s a dome, which means it’s a technical circle. The cornucopia, the bunch of cogs

that turn the spinner to where they're supposed to go… perhaps… I think I'm thinking too deeply into it, but it's quite a cool design."

Ilex screams.

Harry jumps at the sight.

She points a finger at him. "So what you're saying is that in every spot in the jungle there is danger?"

"Yes," he agrees. "I do not recommend we go anywhere near the forest from now on."

The woman frowns at him with intense eyes but doesn't appear angry at him. She goes back down to the water and begins to dunk her head down, clearing her head. He didn't know what to make of the situation. Esteven sighed, speaking up to them, but specifically him. "She's grieving and so am I. I think Ilex thinks if she had known about the dangers of the jungle beforehand, we wouldn't have lost them."

Harry pauses, knitting his eyebrows together. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay, it's not your fault."

Esteven follows Ilex to the water. Cedric and Cho stay, gutting the fish as Hermione stands up and begins to look for wood they could potentially use to cook the fish. He goes back to sleep because he has nothing better to do.

Esteven is all kinds of things right now, but strong isn't one of them. She sits in the water, next to Ilex, her good old friend ever since she became a victor eight years prior, and wondered if they would be sharing a drink if they weren't in the Games themselves. Her son was dead. Her husband was dead. Her children were somewhere, hopefully safe, with Sirius Black - Harry's proclaimed godfather. Her victor companion was dead. Was she going to die next?

She sighed, washing her face with the water, watching Ilex break down beside her. Ilex was a complex character, she had learnt after being friends with her over the years. She didn't like when people watched her cry because she saw it as being weak, being vulnerable, which it was - but still, there was an innate fear that resonated within Ilex when people saw her cry. That's why, nobody but Esteven was in front of her, because she was the only one she trusted to see her cry.

Ilex never could hold her anger long before it overwhelmed her. Unlike Esteven's husband who bottled it all up, she let it all out before it could do that to her.

Ilex was a woman who reminded Esteven of her youngest. Iris, Ilex, they even had similar names. They both could hold a mean grudge and were some of the bluntest people that Esteven knew, but how they reacted to trauma was vastly different. Iris was like her father. Bottled it all in until she could only cry and destroy herself - and everyone around in the process. Ilex cried because her emotional capacity could only allow so many ounces of defeat before it impacted this strong, but fragile woman. She sighed, narrowing down at the water that kept wetting her backside.

Silver and Radian are like her. Were.

When she got upset, she felt uncontrollable. Silver was the same. So was Radian. Their whole worlds' collapsed when something negative happened to affect their lives. Silver—being a tribute in the 74th Annual Hunger Games. Radian, when he lost his brother and his father. He couldn't stop crying and being a child over it. Iris only grew angrier. As much as Esteven loves all of her children, she grew angry for them. Watching them have to go through all of this at such a young age. And it wasn't even because she was a victor, herself.

It was because of the random draw of the bowl.

She sighed, looking up to the sky sadly. One day, she'll be able to see her children again. All of them. In life and death. She held back her tears, not wanting to cry. Not because it would be seen as weak and vulnerable but because she didn't want her children to see her cry. She only wetted her face again. Ilex softly asked her, "do you think we'll ever get it?"

"Get what?" She asked, nervous at what she could say.

"Our victor's life."

Esteven paused, narrowing her eyebrows at the sand. "I think we'll find out. Let's live day by day before we're able to determine that question." She drew a love heart in the sand. "I think Borgin would've liked to know Harry figured it out all on his own. A clock, who could've imagined?" She smiled softly at the sand before her forehead grew tenser at a thought. Esteven turned her head to Ilex. "Can you keep Granger in check?"

Ilex rose an eyebrow towards her. “Granger—oh, Hermione. What did she do to make you so mad?”

“She’s irritatingly jealous of Harry. I don’t like it.”

“Fair enough,” Ilex sighed. “But if we look at it from her perspective - he is something to be jealous of.” Esteven shrugged her shoulders, not caring about that. If Hermione Granger survived, she wasn’t going to make it her personal mission to kill herself. But if she got herself killed, that was all on her. It’s why Esteven asked Ilex to take care of her - protectively - like how Esteven was going to look after Harry. She didn’t have the heart to care for this Hermione Granger, Harry so dearly cared about.

“Do you feel ready to go back?” Esteven asked her. “We should follow through with Harry’s plan.”

“Harry had a plan?”

“Knowing how his brain works, I’m sure he has one.”

They walked back to him and sure enough, he was beginning to discuss how they should map out the arena and the sections by heading to the cornucopia and figuring out how the variables in the arena worked. Esteven agreed solely for the fact because they needed to go to the cornucopia and fight the Careers there. She redid her hair and put it into a high ponytail, trudging through the sand behind Harry. Watching him, she noticed how exhausted he appeared to be. He was yawning and not focused at all. Perhaps they should leave him behind…

But he wouldn’t accept that. She sighed, standing to walk on the rocks.

Esteven needed to get the wire at the cornucopia. It’s why she wasn’t declining to the plan Harry had. It was a cover for retrieving it and being able to explode the force field. She had her weapon and pushed past Harry so she was at the front. He didn’t ask why but he appeared surprised, maybe he knew how bad he looked. The victors knew that they were going to have to fight the Careers here. It was their best moment which meant they had to be extra careful when saving Harry - but, she doesn’t think Gleam or Hero or Victor or—maybe Millicent might—try and actually kill Harry in comparison to them.

They all kind of knew something was up and it was beneficial for Harry to be alive so she doesn’t think anyone would try and kill him.

He's precious in their eyes as a friend and to the cause of the uprisings they knew were happening in the other Districts from talking about it with one another. They weren't going to touch him, perhaps gently - just to act like they were fighting and attacking him - but they weren't going to do anything lethal.

With Ilex protecting Hermione, Cedric and Cho protecting each other, Harry with the ultimate protection of nobody touching him, Esteven had to stay alive. Once she retrieved the wire, she clipped it to her belt. Harry was looking out at the arena, Esteven moving over to him. "You think it definitely looks like a clock then."

"It appears too weird to be anything but," he tells her. "All those sections - each with a different horror. But last night, there weren't many deaths in comparison to what I would've thought. I mean, Cedric could've died with the forcefield and I with the monkeys, but in general most of the deaths were at the cornucopia. Waves… I wonder if you're caught in the section, you're there until the horror is over."

That was a frightening thought, wasn't it?

She touched his hair and he leant into the touch almost like a cat. "Come on, we've got to head back now - I think everyone has their goods."

Esteven walked back with Harry close to her and she watched as the Careers came out of their hiding spot. "Careers!" She shouted, Cedric immediately dodging in time to avoid Victor's spear. Ilex whacked Gleam's knife out of the way from Hermione, and Cho got cut from a small knife Hero threw in her direction. Esteven was glad they were out further enough so she could tell Harry. "Harry, you need to go back to the beach."

"What?" He asked, "what do you mean—"

"Don't question me. Head back to the beach. I don't want you to turn back." She passed him the wire. "Take this with you. I want you to stay there, and not to move. If one of us dies, do not think of it like you did nothing to help us. You did. You're much suited on the beach." And she didn't want to think of him as vulnerable. He sighed, heading back to the beach with the wire in his hands. Good, that means she'll have the wire no matter what if he keeps guard of it.

Returning back to the battlefield, she throws a knife at Victor - who was closest to her - and he gets stabbed in the shoulder. She might be

fifty, but she had the body of someone who kept up with her training regime, even after three kids. So it wasn't a surprise when she saw Newt and Emmeline above the cornucopia, throwing things at the Careers.

Then, she heard a scream and a cannon.

Dead, Cedric Diggory slipped into the ocean from Gleam's long knife being plunged into his throat. Esteven crinkles her eyebrows, knowing that Cho was going to be useless now. She was an emotional, traumatised young girl who could only burst into tears. They needed to win against these Careers and soon or else they'll pick them apart like sorting lolly flavours.

Newt heads over to where Victor, Ilex, Millicent, and Cho are fighting whilst Esteven and Emmeline head over to where Gleam, Hero, and Cedric were just fighting. He was outnumbered, that was the reason for his death. Esteven wasn't quick enough to dodge a knife and it nicked her forehead. She went after Hero whilst Emmeline went after Gleam. They fought until Esteven felt the cornucopia rumble. "What the hell is happening?" She dodged another knife from Hero, and the upset teenager glared.

But then, it began to spin them.

Slipping to the ground, Esteven grabbed a crevice in the rocks and held on for dear life. She was certainly happy she sent Harry back to the beach with the wire or else she doesn't know if he would've survived or not. Hearing a shout, Esteven noticed Hero slipping and sighed. For some unknown reason, Harry wanted this victor to survive. Grabbing his hand and using all her strength she received from cooking, cleaning, and working around the house as well as working out on a regular basis - he held on. Unfortunately, both Emmeline and Gleam went into the water, unable to hold on - and he began to slip on the hold she had on him.

Then, a cannon went off to which she grimaced at. Then another, and another. Four cannons went off and she could only imagine who they were. Hero slipped from her hands at the last minute and she gripped as hard as she could to the rock to keep herself from falling.

When the cornucopia finally came to a stop, she coughed and began to step up onto the rocks to see what happened. Her eyes went wide. Victor was dead, floating in the water, so was Ilex, Millicent and Emmeline. She paused to look at all the bleeding they received.

They drowned because of the water, that much was obvious, but four of her good friends were dead. Hermione was crying, deserved she thinks, unhappy herself and she heads over to Cho - who realised her boyfriend's death. She held a hand onto her shoulder and Newt grimace, coming over to her. "Do you have the wire?"

"With Harry, over on the beach."

"Good," he told her, obviously devastated. "Let's hope this won't be all for nothing."

"It won't be all for nothing," Esteven knows. "That kid might be sick and unmoving, but he isn't going to stop believing the things he does." She pats Cho's shoulder, "come on, love. Let's get back to the beach lining where it's safe." Unlike Cho, Hermione didn't lose anyone. Victor was beloved by all and she didn't have a relationship with him. Cho did with Cedric and he was more loyal to the cause. She dismissed her emotions entirely. This was all for Harry.

Harry sits on the beach, traumatised.

With this stupid coil, he is told to wait until the others come back for him. He listens to one, two, three, four, five deaths—and cannot do anything. Not with the way the cornucopia spins, which is quite lethal, and he doesn't know who survived and who didn't. He clenched his eyebrows, worried, and everything ached. Then, he saw who came back of the alliance.

Esteven was leading the pack. Then, there was Hermione. Cho. And Newt. He blinked… that's all of who survived. Cedric died. Ilex died. Emmeline died. He gulped, before wondering who of the Careers were dead. Both Hermione and Cho were weepy so he predicted that Victor was dead amongst the Careers. "Cedric, Emmeline, Ilex, and Victor died. Who was the fifth?"

"Millicent," Esteven told him. "The spinning cornucopia got most of them."

"Ah," he frowned at the sand. "What are we doing now?"

"I think we should head into the forest," the mother tells him. "We need to get away from the beach." He was about to question it but decided against it. Gifting Esteven her wire, the two led the group into the forest and they were cautious not to meet any mutts or dangerous

situations where they'd potentially die. Their numbers were quite low. Then, faintly in the distance, Harry heard it. It was the sound of Tom's voice. He paused, thinking it was the sound of his imagination until Esteven screamed, "Radian?"

Did they have Tom?

But that would mean they'd know about Tom and Harry—his mind began to think at two hundred kilometres per hour. They got him. They caught him. Screams of Tom's began and he rushed into the forest with Esteven with the rest of the group telling them to slow down. He didn't shout Tom's name, he pretended it was someone else, but he listened to his screams and cried. It wasn't only his. There was Sirius', there was Nathaniel's, there was Abelene's, Sibyl's. He glanced around, trying to determine where the sound was coming from. Grabbing his bow and arrow, he fired it at one of the birds that flew past and Tom's screams went silent.

Esteven watching him and narrowing her eyebrows, they realised what this was. The next section of horrors. Harry fell to the ground, clasping his hands over his ears as he closed his eyes. The screams of his loved ones terrorised him. He shook with overwhelming sobs as he tried to hide. Esteven couldn't stop screaming and crying either, desperate to stop hearing her loved ones cries for help. He banged on the section barrier, Hermione, Cho, and Newt there - trying to converse with them, but being unable to do due to his prediction.

This was fucked.

He laid on the ground, wanting to die. It's the first time he ever wanted to die before, but he wanted to never live another day after this. They were calling out his name, asking why he wasn't helping them, and he couldn't do anything but kneel on the ground and rack sobs. Cedric was dead. Ilex was dead. Emmeline was dead. Victor was dead. Millicent was dead. He could've helped them. He could've tried to protect them. He—he couldn't stop shaking once the section was over, Hermione hugging him.

"They're dead, 'Mione. They—they—they," he couldn't form another word. Only devastated.

He knew he looked ugly at that moment. Sunburnt and covered in salt, sand, and sea water - his hair was a mess and his cheeks were burning with his tears, and he was only agitating himself more by crying. Hermione held him and rocked him and they returned to the

beach, heading into the jungle, a horrible idea. Harry sat in the water, wanting to forget everything existed. The Games, the victors, everyone and everything. This was not even the war yet; this was just the beginning. He glared at the sky, knowing the game makers were laughing at them like they were dolls.

He screamed, putting up his finger to the sky. “I hate you all! You think that’s funny? Well it’s not!”

“Harry,” Esteven shook her head. “Don’t.”

“What’s the worst they can do to me, Esteven?” He genuinely asked. Amused by her bewildered look in her eyes. “I’ve been here this arena, twice, in two years. I’m not even eighteen yet. I might not make it to my eighteenth birthday, Esteven. I find it real fuckin’ amusing these guys think it’s funny to put the screams of my beloveds in the arena just because they think it’ll be funny.”

“I fucking hate you all!”

Esteven sighed.

Chapter End Notes

I love complexity & just because Hermione has emotions does not mean SLANDER. It's the same with Tom and Harry, they're infuriating but justttt because this is targeted at HARRY does not mean u can slander my girl. have ur opinions but, she's goated. Also, sorry for the lack of Ron; I really should've added more of him in this fic.

always dead, will always die --> cedric :(
haha, lol; poor cho.

Up next, "Mean"

P S

Mean

Chapter Notes

Posted: 18th of May, 2024
ASSESSMENT SEASONNNNNN sorry for the no posts during the week, I'm quite the busy gal
Soccer + Hiphop + Pilates + School + Assessments = no time to post :(
I'm SOWRRYY pooks

BTW It only gets worse from here so, grab tissues?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They get gifted bread that night long after Harry is asleep.

Twenty-four pieces from District 3, meaning that tomorrow night, they were going to have to try a way to escape the arena. Esteven looked at the lightning tree that struck at midnight and midday, keeping watch. She eyed the distance when she saw a cannon and a mutilated tribute rise from the jungle. Then, the hologram appeared in the sky telling them who was dead. From District 2, Viktor Krum and Millicent Bulstrode. From District 4, Cedric Diggory. From District 5, Therma Waverly. From District 8, Dyneema Kelsi and Muff Moire. From District 10, Emmeline Vance. From District 11, Storgis Podmore. Eight more tributes died. Add that to the six the previous night. That's sixteen dead, eight tributes to go.

She counted them. In their alliance, there was five left alive. Harry, Hermione, Newt, Cho, and herself. From the Careers, there were only Hero and Gleam left. That means Ceres Houska was the only tribute alive, not in any group. Esteven wondered what section she was in.

Regardless of what section she was in, Esteven needed to go to sleep. Waking up Hermione for the first night watch, she explained the situation and went to bed in-between Harry and Cho. Before she went to sleep, she noticed Harry twisting his engagement ring around underneath his brace. She smiled sadly, hoping things would work out for him. Esteven passed out.

When Harry woke up, he noticed the rest of the tributes were awake. He wiped at his eyes, getting rid of the sleep that was sticking his eyelashes together and judged them for what they were all doing. Cho was catching them food whilst Esteven presented him bread. “Sponsors,” she told him, knowingly. He ate without argument, leaning against the tree. Hermione was sharpening her axe with a rock and Newt was relaxing in the water. Esteven asked them all to come over to them to discuss what they were doing to do.

Hermione kept sharpening her axe but looked up to Esteven. Cho put the fish she caught on a leaf as Newt laid on the ground with his hair in the sand. “I was thinking at we head over to the lightning tree,” she pointed over to the distance where it was, “and electrocute the remaining Careers with the wire.”

Harry blinked, frowning, “uh no.”

“Why do you want to save them, Harry?” Hermione snapped at him. “They killed—“

“Who cares, Hermione?” Harry gritted his teeth. “We’re in the Hunger Games. Death is bound to happen. What is Hero and Gleam going to do to us. We’re weak without their group of four. Trying to electrocute them is going to give them the perfect opportunity to split us up. Divide and conquer, remember. I swear - that’s like the first rule of battle strategy.” He stood up and went into the sea, not wanting to listen to that plan any further. It was stupid and he knew why they were doing it, an excuse to blow up the forcefield surrounding the arena but still, he doesn’t feel like it’s necessary to do so. He floated on his back, looking up to the sky.

Esteven came over to him. “I know why you don’t like the plan but…”

“I know, you don’t need to tell me.” He sighed. “It’s just that once they’re dead we only have ourselves left.” She blinked and understood what he meant. Esteven wet her face with the water. Neither spoke of what would happen afterwards, not wanting the game makers to understand they would escape after this.

She cleared her throat. “Let’s hope you get what you want then?”

Beginning to take off towards where the lightning tree was, Harry lingered behind the group. Electrocution was the best disguise for their plan, but he wasn’t enthusiastic enough to lie. Harry ignored Hermione, not wanting to speak to her that instant. Cho handed him some of the fish.

“Thanks,” he told her and began to eat it.

With fresh fish and bread in his stomach, he felt better than he had in a long time. It took them two hours to walk around the beach to get to the lightning trees section. Setting into the jungle, knowing Hero and Gleam weren’t going to touch them until they began to split-up, he ventured into the jungle towards where the tree was. It took a long time until they were fully submerged with the jungle and Harry was needing a drink. Taking the spile, he knocked it against a tree and drank the fresh water that came out of it. Newt drank some water after him, before the three women took their turn. Harry drank more water and they continued to walk towards the tree.

Harry swung his knife around, practising, and cut a few trees on the way up to alert them of the direction back towards the beach. He was also angry, that’s why he was cutting the trees. Once they had found the lightning tree, Harry sat down and watched as Hermione and Esteven began to wrap the coil around the tree. He placed the bow and arrow down, not needing the weapon. Perhaps one of the others might need it to blow up the arena if this doesn’t work.

Newt sits beside him, checking his temperature. “You still feel warm.”

“Yeah,” he sighed, pushing his hair back. “I don’t think it will go down.”

“At least it will be cooler tonight.”

Harry hummed - knowing the underlying meaning of what he meant by that.

He hoped this worked.

Sirius narrowed his eyebrows at the peacekeepers that were driving over top of the bridge he was needing to pass to get to District 13. They had twenty minutes until they arrived at the entrance of the District and the peacekeepers were heading from the edge of District 3 down to District 12, suspiciously. He didn’t like the looks of it. Grabbing one of Harry’s phones he stole, he tilted his head and pressed the phone against his shoulder. Nathaniel picked up. “It’s time; get everyone out of District 12 slowly. There are a lot of peacekeepers around District 3, 12, and around District 13’s forest. Begin to take them up and into the forest, kid.”

“Alright,” Nathaniel said. “We’ll get to it then. Be safe.”

“Don’t you worry about me, make sure Abelene and Sibyl stay alive.”

“Got it.”

Amelia stopped smoking when she saw the peacekeepers. She ducked down and told the kids to keep a low profile as they were going to go through the forest to get to District 13. Sirius turned off to head into the forest with their car and head further east. If they went this way, they would get further enough and find the river that heads to the big lake outside of District 12. It took them half an hour to get into District 13 through the shortcut, Sirius noticing two people in camouflage - hiding out with guns before them. District 13 citizens, stepping outside of the car, he put his hands up. “I’m from District 12, Sirius Black. I’m a part of the rebel group in the Districts. I’ve brought Esteven Graves’ two children and the rebel leader within District 2, Amelia Bones. Shall we pass or discuss this further?”

A man sat up from his shooting position, “follow us in, Mr. Black.”

Getting back inside of the car, he watched as the ground opened and he drove down the steep slope into District 13’s back entrance. The man patted the side of his door, “let’s talk more inside.”

Amelia Bones got out with the two kids who hid behind him, observing one of District 13’s entrances. He put his hair into a ponytail as he walked further into the room, noticing all the nuclear power they had at the tips of their fingers. A rebellion, he thought, was going to change everything. This was what Lily and James were fighting for all those years ago. Entering the elevator with his companions, a woman locked eyes with the children. “What are your names?” She had a clipboard and a pen.

Iris went first. “My name is Iris Blue Graves. I’m twelve, my birthday was on the twelfth of May. I was born in 2337.” She got a photo taken of her.

Radian sighed, rolling his eyes. “I’m Radian Rust Graves. I’m fifteen. My birthday was on the seventh of February. I was born in 2334.” The lady took a photo of him. “Our brother, Silver Gray Graves was born in 2332. He passed away last year, 2248.” She began to observe the two photos before uploading them together. She showed the four the screen of her phone. It was three pictures, one of Iris, Radian, and Silver. Sirius noticed how Silver appeared younger in the phone they collected than the one in the Hunger Games.

“Would you rather us call you your names or your first name?” She asked. “I know that double first names are quite common in District 3 and District 12 due to the history behind having double names in Europe.”

“Europe?” Sirius tilted his head at the continent. “Do you think it still exists?”

“Perhaps, perhaps not. We haven’t made contact with them if they do - it’s not like we’re in the state too. But maybe one day we’ll fly over it and see what is left of the continent. Either way, it doesn’t change where your names originate from. District 13’s children have a lot of names. Although, most only have two we refer to them as. So… Iris Blues and Radian Rust. It’s lovely to meet you.” She shakes both of their hands.

“Um?” Radian took her hand with surprise.

“You’ll get used to it. Now, what are your skills?”

The elevator opens and the man tells Sirius and Amelia to follow him. He pauses, not wanting to be separated from the kids. It was his duty to protect them, even in District 13. The woman pauses before she leaves with them, turning to Sirius who stared - nerved by the prospect they were going to separate them. “Sirius Orion Black, don’t you worry about Iris Blues or Radian Rust. We’re going to take good care of them. We’ll assign you your rooms and you will be right next to them. It’s only protocol that we find what they’d like to do in District 13, and give them an education. It serves them purpose whilst they’re here. Then, their mother can take over.”

“You’re needed with Commander Grindelwald,” the other man said. “We do not make him wait.”

Sirius glances down at the two kids. “You will find me at dinner.”

“Alright, grump.” Radian rolls his eyes.

“Sure, Sirius. We’ll see you then.”

Sirius and Amelia head down further underground until they’re thirty floors under. They observe all the clothes the citizens of District 13 wear as they pass. They were outsiders as Sirius adjusted his vision to the obnoxious lights that plagued them. There wasn’t a single inch of sun down here, that they were all sickly pale without vitamin C. Sirius felt bad for them, but didn’t - at the same time. These guys were

proficient at what they did. Self-sustaining life underground. Sirius wondered how long the bunker had been there for as he entered the Commander's meeting room. The two rebellion leaders entered the room to find a tall man studying them. "Hello, Sirius Orion Black. Amelia Bones. It's about time we met in person."

"Yes," Sirius nodded his head. "Does District 13 have all the rooms now for District 12?"

"After we spoke last time, we added in more additional spacing. I hope you find it to your liking." Sirius nods his head sharply once. "On a more positive note, your grandson is in the top eight. They're about to blow up the forcefield, how inventive. I wondered how much more work that was theirs than your grandson's lover, the rebellion leader in the Capitol: Tom Riddle?" Commander Grindelwald chuckled, connecting his hands together. "Oh, Albus is going to hate this."

Yes, Sirius thought. You and 'Albus' do have a disgusting relationship, don't you?—just how much of that is hate and how much of that is love, is unknown. Amelia yawned beside him. "There's not a lot of air down here," she comments."

"No, there isn't, but after a while - your body gets used to the amount of oxygen it has to breathe. Regardless, I think I can see some winning odds if we retrieve both the President's loyal successor and the victor of the 74th and 75th Annual Hunger Games. Oh how, Albus will be wrecked inside. Hopefully tonight goes smoothly." He had a wicked smile, grinning like death had loomed over their door with vicious intent but Grindelwald had hammered it back double the amount harder. Sirius did not like the man. Neither did Amelia from the looks of it.

"So… District 12 has around twelve thousand people?" Grindelwald asked. "That's not many in-compared to the millions that District 4 or District 10 or District 11 have. Either way, we won't be able to support all of them comfortably underground unless they were planning to sleep together in various rooms."

"Not everyone is going to survive." Sirius tells him. "We know that. But all the babies, children, women, and young adults will. Anyone who has use, will." He knew what a big decision it was to make half of their District perish but for the sake of the citizens in District 12 that will live, they had to make it horrific. Nathaniel knew that; he was telling everyone it was time for the ones who weren't going to survive.

Everyone else, he was getting out of District 12. Perhaps maybe three thousand will survive, not even six - but they will find out eventually.

Commander Grindelwald commended him. “Good job. I’m assuming most of the young adults will be made up of young men and women willing to fight?”

“And musicians, performers,” Sirius said. “Like I said, anyone with use.”

“And what makes those children useful?”

“Like you told us before, the Capitol designers that were working on Harry Potter and Hermione Granger were being kidnapped which means they are necessary. For hair and makeup, for performance value. Musicians and performers are both necessary for clipping together acts and understanding what makes the other, non-supporting Districts want to support the cause. District 1, 2, 5, 6, and 9 are all unsupporting, yes?” Grindelwald agreed with him. “Then, we’re going to have to show them what it means to be united through other means. Visuals. Manipulation. They are going to be your best bet with the vision of the new generation.”

Grindelwald tilted his head. “Like the song Harry sang during his interview?”

Sirius scratched the back of his neck. “That song wasn’t the real one. He made most of it up, but he can sing and song-write. He is a lyrical genius. He’s a very persuasive person, like Tom is. Either way, no, nobody else in the world has his gifts. They originate from his parents.” Grindelwald takes that information into consideration.

Grindelwald tells the two of them that they’ve been assigned members of the Fission. Soldier Black and Soldier Bones. Their first names were for family-members or friends only. Everyone else was to call them Soldier, and in response, they called them back Soldier. The Fission was only for the strongest members of District 13, led by Grindelwald’s son and daughter, Lynx Fission and Circe Fission. Both were referred to as Soldier L.Fission or C.Fission. Lynx Fission was two years older than his sister, the oldest twenty-nine, the youngest twenty-five.

Sirius accepted his fate on the Fission.

Sirius and Amelia were taken to be sanitised of diseases and brought District 13, Fission uniforms. A dark blue instead of the grey everyone

else wore. Once they were groomed and tidied, they entered the cafeteria where Iris and Radian rushed over to them. They wore dark grey uniforms, which the children wore. Iris grinned widely. “I’ve been allowed to skip to the thirteenth grade.”

“Thirteenth grade?” Amelia tilted her head. “Like—eighteen year-old schooling?”

“Technically yes, but no. Not here. Thirteen year-olds take thirteenth grade before they are pronounced with their role in District 13, meaning next year I’ll be allowed to assist with medicine and weaponry!” Iris nudges her brother, who appears less than impressed. “Radian is already fifteen so he’ll be training with the teenagers to become a soldier. Soldier L.Fission was very impressed with his skills, I heard.”

“Soldier L.Fission?” Sirius asked. “He’s your teacher?”

“Yes, both Fissions are.”

“Oh god,” he glared at the table. “Even more people to worry about.”

“I agree,” Radian says - and Sirius thought he was about to die when he heard that. The kid’s instincts were good like Harry’s. “I don’t trust any of them.” They headed over to grab their dinner, disgusted when they saw what they received. “The bare nutrients needed to survive, and your District 12 citizens aren’t even here yet. Imagine what the rations are going to be like in the next few weeks. Extremely low, how disgusting.”

Iris grumbles. “One virus and this place collapses.”

Sirius agreed with them.

He wished he was dead a long time ago.

Esteven has Harry and Cho uncoil the wire down towards the beach where they’re trying to electrocute Hero and Gleam. They’re cautious and slow as they move down the steps and roots of the jungle, the two quiet. Harry didn’t feel like talking at all with the state of his forehead, burning up even more despite the cool air. He has to stabilise himself with the multiple trees they pass to be able to keep up with the speed they were progressing at.

Cho had dark under-eyes as if she hadn't slept at all in the past night. He averted his eyes, glancing away from her and her pasty, sweaty skin. Harry knew he looked awful as well - and he was so bothered that he was sick because it was the only time he wasn't supposed to be. Harry was supposed to be strong and healthy for this to work. He felt like he was fucking it all up.

He grumbled under his breath but Cho ignored him.

She slowly kept turning the coil until it got stuck back up somewhere. Harry went to turn to see what the issue was, having difficulties earlier when they were uncoiling the wire, but he was whacked in the head. "Ah!" He hissed, holding his forehead as Cho grabbed his arm with striking speed. She glared at him. "You stay down."

Harry screamed when she plunged her knife into his arm, remembering that she must've been forced to do this but either Esteven or Newt. Hermione wouldn't know this was a part of the plan, but he still screamed regardless. Cho cut his suit and splattered his body all over his body. The two Careers that must've been watching, pounced after Cho who headed back up to the tree. He was going to stay down until he saw two bright eyes above him, Harry staring back at Gleam who had a knife over his body.

Hero glared at her. "Stop it, Gleam."

"What are you guys doing?" She questioned Harry, and he only choked.

Hero grabbed where his tracker was cut out, applying pressure to the wound. Gleam looked down at the wound, noticing that it was where his tracker was. Grabbing her own arm, with one of his knives, she began to plunge it deep into her skin and remove the tracker. Nervous, Gleam asked Hero to hold out his arm. Harry grabbed Hero's hand and smiled up at him, before Hero sighed in defeat. The teenager gave her his tracker arm and she stabbed him, taking the tracker out. The woman dropped the knife and picked Harry up. "Come on, let's get you somewhere out of the road. Hero," she snapped to him. "Go act like we're following them."

She got a bandage from her small pack, wrapping his arm with it. "Don't let them know, we know." Harry accepted her picking him up and carrying him - turning away from where they were going to get electrocuted if they stayed there. Shivering, Gleam frowned down at him. "You're so feverish. Let's try and keep that temperature down."

Shakily, handing her the spile, she placed him down close to the path in-which they took. Gleam banged the spile against the tree where water splattered out. Breathing in the water, engulfing herself with it - Harry, understanding that she must've not had a drink in ages, she got a leave and began to feed him the water. Then she wet more leaves and placed them over his forehead. "If someone doesn't kill you, this fever might."

"Thanks," he sighed softly, relaxed.

"Let's get that blood off you."

She washed his face and suit, before wrapping his arm up.

Harry slept as she protected him like a guardian. Gleam kept drinking water and kept changing the leaves on his forehead as they prepared for the enviable to happen. Then, they heard the screaming - and shouts. "Harry! Harry! Where are you?" It was Newt. Gleam put a knife to Harry's neck as if to say, move and you die. He gulped, knowing he should say something but with the vulnerable position he was in now he didn't want to do anything to agitate Gleam. He laid his head back down, unmoving. Gleam and Harry let the sound of Newt ring out before it disappeared. And then, the inevitable happened.

The lightning lit up and cracked down on the tree. Gleam and Harry sat there as they watched the electrical current explode the wire, cracking back towards them. Ringing in his ear, being too close to the sound of the explosion, he laid there on the ground - wondering what was happening. Above them, he noticed an aircraft before his brain decided to shut down.

Sirius watched as Esteven, Newt, and Cho were searching for Harry.

Unfortunately for Newt, Hero found him first and killed him; a cannon going off. Hermione was at the tree with the bow and arrow had left at the tree, wrapping a piece of wire around it. Sirius always thought of Hermione as a genius. She was an adaptive, smart, sometimes cocky, teenage girl but she was a genius in her own right. The thunder began to grumble and the lightning crackled before it hit the tree, and the arrow Hermione shot up into the sky.

BOOM!

Everything lost power.

Let's hope Tom is able to get everyone out of the arena, in time, before the Capitol shows up. Sirius had a small Iris wrapped around his body, who he hugged and comforted back. Radian shaky besides Amelia who took one of his hands and kept saying “you’re mother is going to be okay, everything is going to be okay.”

District 12 was a mess.

Nathaniel carried two little girls down into the meadow, passing them to the twins who were helping the teenagers hurry further into the forest where the bombs wouldn’t touch them. The adults were taking care of the peacekeepers and fighting them as they protected them. Abelene and Sibyl were safe, looking after the children as he helped Ron, Charlie, and Bill get everyone out. The rules were simple, anyone under thirty or had special skills like the ability to cook: fight: hunt: or plant were allowed to stay. The rest weren’t allowed to come, and they had accepted it. However, that meant Arther Weasley wasn’t allowed to come with them. Molly was because she could cook and plant foods, but he couldn’t.

He told him to hide out in Victor’s Village if he wanted the best chance at survival with some of the other men and people who wanted to survive, but he didn’t know how much they were doing to take his advice. There was a two year-old boy crying for his father, but Nathaniel picked him up, bounced him up and down on his hip, and tried to find his mother.

Nathaniel was good with kids, but Harry was better. He knew how to soothe them and put them to sleep easily. He would sing and play with them in the mud. If a kid was crying because someone was bullying them, he would help the kid stand up to their bullies and deal with the issue. He was kind and took care of some of the babies mother’s weren’t able to because they had to work in the mines to feed the kid. Nathaniel adored him, flushing as he sadly stared back at District 12. This whole rebellion started because Harry was picked as the District 12 tribute. Nathaniel doesn’t think it would’ve happened otherwise.

He kissed the baby’s forehead, cooing to the little child, and passed him onto Sibyl who had Harry’s gift of relaxing babies. Nathaniel went back to try and find more people to help out. It wasn’t long before

everyone was accounted for as they took off towards the shelters they created for the escapees of District 12. Nathaniel picked up a five year-old from a mother who was taking care of two children, and took the oldest from her. “How are you Ash?”

“Things could be better, Nathan. Falk’s a little sick.”

“We’ll try to heal her the best we can,” the girl leant her head to his shoulder as Ash carried her son on her better hip. CRASH! Behind them, everyone screamed and he flinched, knowing it was time. The bombers had come for the citizens. “Everyone!” He shouted. The citizens all looked at him as he stood tall amongst the masses. “Stay until the tree line - make sure you hide until the leaves. We don’t know if the bombers are going to try and attack the forest!”

Fred and George ran forward towards him. “Nathaniel, we need to split up the groups.”

Nathaniel nodded at them. “Alright, I’ll take one group with Ron to the north. You two take another half to the south. We’ll stay there until all the bombers are gone. Let’s find shelter everyone and keep calm! There’s no need to panick yet.” Splitting up, Ron and Nathaniel took one group to the north. Once hidden away, the rain starting to plummet down on them, he gave some of the young mother’s blankets for their children as the bombers ran out through District 12. Screams in the distance, not coming from the north but the west were making some of the children cry at the sound. Ron, Ginny, Nathaniel, Abelene, and Sibyl looked through the forest to find the bombs pelting down onto District 12.

Abelene began to cry. “This is so sad.”

“Harry warned us,” Ron said, upset. “Let’s not let this chance go to waste.”

Ron whispered, with his eyebrows knitted together, “do you think Dad’s safe?”

“He would be if he’s at Victor’s Village. The bombers would be trying to make a point, by not touching the village. That anything they destroy is what they choose to destroy. We’ll have a rescue group after all the bombers are gone, but first District 13. We’ll go when they’re gone.”

“For now, let’s keep warm,” Ginny shivered.

Nathaniel kept watch through the forest at all the explosions in the distance. There was screaming and crying; all of the children, teenagers, and young adults were safe and accounted for. The bombers went for hours. It wasn't until it was completely dark when they stopped - and nobody moved for an hour. When the hour was up, Nathaniel went to go speak to Fred, George, Charlie, and Bill about what to do next. The group decided it was best that they leave the survivors there for now and get most of the ones who were in the forest back to District 13. The bomber still might be around, camouflage in the air, after all. Slowly and surely, District 12 began to move to District 13. Nathaniel got a call from Sirius. "What happened?" He asked.

He shuttered, knitting his eyebrows together, as he walked through the forest with the Weasleys. "It was a success. All of the young adults, teenagers, children, mother's, and chosen adults were accounted for. We're walking through the forest to District 13. We should get there in two days if there aren't any mishaps. Is Grindelwald going to come collect us?"

"We're not sure yet," Sirius pursed his lips, appearing annoyed. "No sign of Harry's removal yet."

"What?" Nathaniel shouted. "What do you mean?"

"Tom hasn't said anything about how the mission's success was yet."

Nathaniel turned his head to Abelene and Sibyl who were staring at him with fright. His two sisters, who grew up with Harry—he might be dead. Harry might be dead. He shuttered, knitting his eyebrows together before wiping a few stray tears away. A little kid, Silt, took his hand and walked with him through the forest as Nathaniel tried to fight back his emotions. Abelene took the phone from him. "What has been said?"

Sirius narrowed his eyebrows at the screen. "All we know is that they're heading to District 13."

"They don't have Harry?" Sibyl presumed, flabbergasted. "What happened?"

"Apparently, Tom is compromised for the moment."

"And what's that supposed to mean?"

Abelene sighed, thinking quickly. "He is devastated…"

They lost Harry.

Tom stared at the screen.

They didn't have Harry.

They didn't have *Harry*.

They didn't have ***Harry****.*

He screamed and began to destroy everything.

Neuro stitched Esteven's chest as she bled out on the hospital table they stole. Gamma flew the aircraft back to District 13 as Splice wrapped Hermione's wounds. Remus was trying to talk to Hero, but he sobbed uncontrollably, rocking back and forth on the floor, unable to speak - as Tom smashed plates, kicked boxes, punched the wall, enraged. He shouted nonsense, death threats amongst other things, but all he was - was devastated. He cried, shoulders shaking as he fell to the floor, trying to breathe. "I'm going to kill him. I'm going to kill him. I'm going to kill Dumbledore—" Tom felt Francisca touch his forearm softly, telling him it was okay - and they'll get him back.

But, they didn't know that—he was going to die with him.

They were never going to get married: Harry was never going to know peace: Harry might not survive: Tom might end up alone. What's all of this war for if Harry's dead? He screamed, scratching his face as he went back to smashing and kicking and breaking things. He couldn't help himself. Nobody stopped him. Newt was dead. Harry, Gleam, and Ceres Houska were taken by the Capitol. Cho was passed out against Hermione's shoulder as the girl softly cried.

Tom kept screaming at people until Remus tackled him into a hug and brought him into the room outside of where everyone was watching him. He didn't know how long the man was there, telling him to calm the fuck down, but he sat there - pacified by liquor as the man and Francisca sat with him. Hermione gave Tom Harry's necklace as he fiddled with it, twitching. "He's gone… he's gone…" knitting his eyebrows together, he kept crying.

He didn't fall asleep - despite the alcohol.

Sitting on the kitchen bench, Francisca began to make him food. A

simple soup, she told him. Remus left and Tom thinks he went to cry. The man was Harry's mentor after all, he would have an impact on him. Tom, wrapped up in Harry's blanket, cried as he ate his soup, Francisca rubbing his back softly. "I know," she whispered, wiping away a few stray tears she cried, "I know… but Harry's strong and so long as you're alive, Dumbledore wouldn't kill him."

"I know, that's what makes it worse."

After he finished the soup Francisca made for him, he was in his room, looking up to the roof. Dumbledore wasn't going to be kind to Harry. He was going to torture him. He was going to make his life hell. He was a mean, cruel, torturous man. Tom banged his head against the metal of his bed, angry. Harry wasn't where his tracker said he was. Gamma picked up Hermione, Esteven, Hero, and Cho instead of who they were supposed to get in the first place—Harry. Tom couldn't even find him from where he stood, trying to search for the boy.

He gripped his nails into the skin of his palm and bled. And cried.

When Tom woke up, he was in a hospital room.

Well… it looked like a hospital room. There were obnoxious lights, the sound of beeping like health monitor machines, and the bed was uncomfortable. He glanced up to notice Nathaniel, Harry's ex-boyfriend, sitting at the edge of his bed. He laid there, unwilling, unmotivated to move. Harry was in the Capitol, being tortured by Dumbledore. If it meant Harry's death, Tom was willing to die. Protect them both in the peace of the afterlife, even if it scared Tom so much. "Nice to see you again, Tom." Nathaniel began. "You've been out for a couple of days. Malnutrition, they call it. How long have you been starving yourself?"

He laid there, trying to remember when he last ate. "… I don't know. I've been busy. District 12 is gone, I presume?"

"Everything, except Victor's Village. Three thousand of us escaped."

"Oh… that's good then."

Nathaniel grimaced. "There is no more District 12."

Tom said nothing about his dismay about the lack-of-District. Everyone knew this was going to happen. They chose who they

wanted to save, and left the ones willing to die behind. Harry knew, predicted, and told them. Planned them to escape. Tom was lucky to ever call himself his boyfriend, his fiancé. He asked how many survivors there were out of the ones that were bombed. Fifteen, Nathaniel told him. One of them was the Weasley father. Three thousand and fifteen.

Nathaniel and Tom didn't speak about Harry. He supposed he only came to speak with him because he was the only one willing, or game. He stared up to the room, grimacing. After all those months of careful planning, after all those sacrifices he took, after all those years of suffocating in those Mansion walls: he should've stayed. Dumbledore was right, he was always going to win, because it was the things that people loved the most that were the most dangerous to us. Nathaniel told him, "Commander Grindelwald wants to know if you're going to be okay despite the apparent, quote on quote, setback it was for Harry to be kidnapped. I don't think you will be, but if there's going to be any chance at saving him - it's going to be you proving yourself to him and getting his trust."

"I want to die," Tom told him, honestly. "I want this nightmare to end."

"Pucker-up, President. We aren't going to win if you aren't willing to fight for yourself, and for Harry. Harry needs you. Choose you. Don't allow him to think for a minute, you're not willing to do anything for him." Nathaniel sat up from his hospital bed. "I'm going to get Esteven."

"She's awake?"

"Barely, but lucid enough to want to see you."

Tom laid there, wondering how much time had passed when Esteven stood over him. She was exhausted and holding herself up with crutches. It reminded him of when Harry fractured his ankle. He let the small tear fall down his face. The woman appeared both exhausted and content. However, very annoyed. "I don't know where we went wrong," Esteven began. "I was so close to him." Tom told her not to bother with this; that he accepted it, no matter how he looked. "Okay, maybe not; but right now Harry's life is in danger. We need to go send people to kidnap him back."

He shrugged his shoulders, having already thought that but--"Grindelwald's not allowing it. He's a dick, picky, and

bothersome."

Esteven glared down at him before softening her facial features. "Thank you, Tom. For not making my kids orphans. Thank you for saving me, and them." He hummed, blinking slowly up to the roof before falling asleep again. Everything about life was sucking the energy out of him.

Albus paused the screen when Ms. Granger blew up the arena with the bow and arrow, Mr. Potter left when he went to uncoil the wire with Ms. Chang. Pacing around the room, wondering what to do, he knew a few facts about the young adult. He was the son of Lily Evans-Potter and James Potter. He was the childhood friend of Tom's; who Tom mentioned once, never by name, but only by the title of his "only friend." He was Tom's boyfriend; lover; fiancé - and he convinced Tom to become a rebel on the other side of the war. He glared at the screen where Harry laid with Mrs. Vestis. The child didn't appear to be resisting their input, despite his influence on the rebellion.

Not like he could do much, with a fever of thirty-seven point five celsius. Albus turned his gaze to the young adult strapped to the table in the White Room where five doctors were fixing his tracker wound and pumping antibiotics into his system to manage with the fever. He had a low heart rate and was hardly breathing, needing an oxygen mask.

Being out in the burning heat, frying his brain more than it already was, made the virus worse. Albus thinks it's something Harry contracted before the Games from Borgin and Esteven, that ferocious woman, from their District. Injections were created to micromanage the illness spreading to all the citizens of District 3 - which slowed the works at which technology was created, which wasn't good for the Capitol, meaning the doctors created an injection for them to use, but because Harry wasn't vaccinated — he was subsequently vulnerable to the illness.

If they were frightened that Albus would kill him, he wasn't sure that they should be, this illness might kill him first before he could do anything to hurt and use him. Albus watched Severus as he looked at the doctors working away at him. "This is why Tom betrayed us?" He sneered. "This starved, singing boy from District 12."

"As you know, Severus, this is Lily's boy. He would have this kind of

effect on people."

Severus glared at him. "You said Lily was *dead*."

Albus shrugged his shoulders, thoughtfully, glancing out to the boy who was beginning to have a seizure as the doctors tried to save his life. He put his glass of champagne to his lips, drinking the contents as he watched, interestedly. "I told you I wasn't worried about Tom betraying us. It would bound to happen by the boy's nature. However, after a lot of investigating and finding out the truth about this boy," he gestures his glass to him, "I thought he would be our greatest weapon after Tom no longer proved his use."

"Why do you think I let them go on about their little story?—stringing them along like nothing was wrong?" Albus smirked vindictively, stating, "I always had the upper-hand. Because I have the things that will both destroy them. Tom, Harry. Harry, his parents."

Severus knew Lily; loved Lily even when Lily didn't love him back. Albus knew Lily Evans from when she excelled at schooling in the Capitol when she was a little girl. Her great-grandparents moved from District 2 to the Capitol before the first Rebellion had ended, and she lived a luxurious life with her family until she began to show distance from both the Games and the Capitol. Moving to District 2 when she was fifteen with her uncle, she found a new life there where she was happier. As a Capitol-citizen, despite being in the District, her name was never in the bowl once. Young Severus, who grew up in District 2 before Albus saw his potential and took him in as his own, was babysat by Lily before she left District 2 with her boyfriend, and his best friend to District 12 - where the story began. Where everything began to fall apart.

Albus knew about the three rebellious teenagers from Severus when Albus took him in and made it his mission to capture them and kill them if they did anything to disrupt his empire. Then, Lily had her son, Harry James Potter, and wanted to move back to the Capitol with James where it would be safe for him. Sirius stayed behind in District 12 with his 'debatable' romance, Remus Lupin, the 50th Annual Hunger Games victor, and lived happily. They all did until a young adult, by the name of Peter Pettigrew, snitched on them all - about all the havoc they had caused.

And then, Albus decided to take charge of their fates himself.

They were too unpredictable.

They were slippery bastards, the family. Lily Evans-Potter appeared to know when the peacekeepers were at their front doors and hid them all. It took an entire year from when they moved to the Capitol to be able to find them, but when he did, he struck - and struck hard. He showed Severus their crippled forms. “Lily…” he narrowed his eyebrows at the tied up and drugged woman who was anything but lucid. She was pathetic.

“Lily Evans-Potter and James Potter have always been in the palms of my hands. Harry would do anything for what he calls parents. Even as pathetic as them.” Albus drank more champagne, ignoring the taste of the antidote in his mouth. “Tom might be hopeful, but I will eventually break him in, and Tom would have rathered that I killed him than rather the state he returns in.”

Severus was left behind.

“Let’s see how bright this hope is now… *love*, such a damaging thing.”

Chapter End Notes

I baked my sister the worst cake ever, but it was out of the love of my heart; it was even themed Taylor Swift (she's the biggest swifty) and yk the blank space cake in the music video? Yeah, it's that one with the blood in it. But instead of the boys line, it's 'nightmare dressed like a daydream' cause my sis a bit of a bitch sometimes & so am I and we embrace it! :) Just sisterly love, yk.

Anyway, this is where the sa and traumatic shit begins (dead dove: do not eat) (I'm not going to say it's not that bad, since that's wrong of me to say--but I don't go into immense detail; I didn't like writing it but it's the type of trauma to occur in this situation because of the prospect of love and the mental manipulation Dumbledore is able to cause on Harry) between the 2nd act and 3rd act.

Up next, "The Outside"

P S

The Outside & loml

Chapter Notes

Posted: 26th of May, 2024
sorry guys only 1 chapter today,
I'm literally struggling to keep my eyes open from soccer so next week I'll post again
(Wednesdays aren't working, when they are; I'll post then) until then, enjoy this chapter until next Sunday
I apologise guys.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Grindelwald stood across from him whilst Tom sat on the hospital bed. Passing Tom a device, the man began. “You were telling me across the phone that the best way to utilise the rebellion was to showcase your devotion to the cause. Everyone in District 13 has a purpose. Yours is going to be manipulating and winning over the Districts. How you do that is entirely up to you, but, with addition to your performance - training is going to take place.” Tom accepted that, knowing at one point or another it was going to come up and he’d rather training than not. “You’ll be with my two trusted children, L.Fission and C.Fission, whilst you train so they’re able to give you some guidance. You won’t be joining the Fission.”

“Who’s in the Fission?” Tom asked, tilting his head.

“I’m sure you’ll find out eventually. Propaganda needs to start soon so using that head of yours to think about what to broadcast will be good in the meantime.” Grindelwald asked Tom to follow him. Slowly and suspiciously, he walked through District 13’s dull hallways. The Commander took notice of how he was reacting to the underground bunker. In Tom’s opinion, it was the dullest and lifeless place in Panem. People stopped to thank Grindelwald before proceeding, Tom finding it ridiculous. They stared at him with wide bug eyes and cowered away from him. Grindelwald explained, “after seeing you in the media so many times - they’re having to reconstruct their opinions about you. Even for us, your sway of heart moved people.”

Tom didn’t reply. “Who would you like in your private quarters?”

“What do you mean?” He rose his eyebrow.

“People of high power get more obscure attention to their safety. As a result, we’ve deemed you worthy of such a luxury. You have two large bedrooms to equipped for eight people in total.” Tom immediately thought about Harry being in his room, beside him, cuddled up to him - breathing on his chest as Tom stroked a hand through his beautiful, angelic curls, and comforting the nightmares from him. Now, he was going through an entirely different, and very real nightmare. It made him still, trying not to concentrate on what Dumbledore might be doing to him. Tom relayed, “I would like Harry saved at the quickest notion.”

Grindelwald tilted his head at him. “What makes you think that is going to happen?”

“He’s necessary to the cause.” Tom glares at him, angry. “You should want him back like I.”

The Commander shrugs his shoulders, debating what he was going to do about Harry. “Think of it like this. You’re both as worthy as the other to our cause. We don’t necessarily need him if we’ve got you.” Tom stilled, curling his fist into his palm. Don’t punch him, don’t punch him. Please don’t punch him. “I won’t work nearly as well if I know my lover, the whole reason why I’m on this side of the war, is being tortured and is dead. I won’t work for you. I work because of my love for him.” He points a finger close to Grindelwald’s face. “You either begin to come up with a rescue mission for him, or I leave District 13 - to head to the Capitol - to retrieve him myself.”

Grindelwald laughs at him. Tom glares furiously.

“You’re funny. Albus would kill you the minute you stepped to his door.”

“So be it then. Harry’s worth it.”

Grindelwald stepped out from the elevator, the two walking over to where his quarters would be. He tsks his head at him. They were five levels up from the bottom floor in this arena. Tom showcases his arm to the two rooms. “Who do you want in your rooms, Tom?”

Glancing around at the two king sized beds elevated in the sky, he guessed the other room was the same. “I’d like Harry, Francisca, Neuro, Nathaniel, Abelene, Sibyl, and Sirius Black.” Grindelwald writes their names on a small label across the door. Tom narrows his eyebrows.

The Commander points the pen at his face. “Albus isn’t going to kill him. Like you said, he’s valuable to the cause which means he’s lethal to destroying it as well. If you really want me to save him. Convince the world that whatever he is going to say, or has already said is wrong - that you are really in-love and fighting united for the cause is what keeps you going. After a point, Harry isn’t going to be your focus. It will be the cause. Make sure you’re able to do that and convince everyone of his innocence and forced speeches because I assure you, it might torture him because of what you say, but afterwards would be less torturous when the Districts accept him as one of their own.” Grindelwald clips a small device to his arm. “This tells you what is on your schedule for the day.” It read:

5.30 Training at F4.R2
8.30 Dinner
10. Bedtime

“This will change everyday?”

“Yes, you will have other times nobody else has though because you’re higher up and therefore more important to the cause. Tomorrow, you’ll go to Esteven and speak to her about your chosen weapon you’ll take onto the field at some point or another. You’ll attend meetings and they’ll pop up there. I will see you when I call for you.” Before Grindelwald leaves completely, he tells Tom. “Once you’re able to convince the Districts, we’ll rescue him.”

“And the other victors.” Tom says firmly. “Harry wanted that.”

“I suppose so… they’ll only be executed otherwise. Happy?”

“No but I’ll cope.”

Grindelwald is smug and turns back to where he originally came from. Tom leans against the fence of the barrier that keeps people from falling across the edge, and thinks he might not steal Harry regardless of what they shake on. He turns back to his room and sits on the closest bed. It’s hard and uncomfortable; the aspect of trying to sleep here was hard to swallow. The thought of living here was difficult to accept but sitting up, he glanced at the technology in his skin. Training with Grindelwald’s two children, that sounds like its own personal hell. Tom wondered who their mother (and Grindelwald’s wife) was.

He was given five uniforms. They were a darker shade of blue, unlike the ones he saw on Nathaniel. Most of the people he saw wore grey

uniforms so it must mean a layer of privilege to wear some kind of colour. The training clothes were less baggy and freeing than the normal-wear. He's also supposing he's allowed to train with his shirt off. Either way, he had a lot of time to kill before the training began so he began to think how he could persuade the District's of Harry's innocence - because that was essentially what he was fighting for here. From the corner of his eye, he noticed Neuro watching him. "These are our rooms?" He asked in surprise.

"Yeah," Tom nodded his head at him. "Francisca, you, and me are in this one. Nathaniel, Abelene, Sibyl, and Sirius is in the other one over - but knowing Sirius, he's going to fuck off and sleep with Remus." Neuro nods his head and lays on the bed. "Is your mother in the hospital?"

The kid hums. "It's good - they're taking care of her. How are you, lover-boy?"

Francisca shakes her head, entering the room when she heard that. "Neuro, we talked about this. Harry is a sensitive subject. Have you received any news if they're going to save him or not, Tom?" He relayed what Grindelwald told him. Neuro shouted, "that's bullshit!" "Neuro!"

She turns her head to him. "That's unfortunate. But you're persuasive, Tom. Before you know it, everyone is going to be wanting for Harry's release and Grindelwald would be sure to give it to you." She heads over to his bed, sitting beside him. "I'm sure you put down Harry as your fourth person in this room." He hummed. "That's good then you haven't lost hope."

"What has 13 made you do to be useful?" Tom asks her.

"I'm on your prep team like the rest of the Capitol-stylists. We're designing all kinds of weapons and outfits for you and your team to wear." She passed him a workbook she had seamlessly put a lot of effort into over the past week whilst he was recovering. Neuro speaks up, "I'm a part of the weaponry creation with Esteven. I'm actually her apprentice."

"How is she going?"

"Quite sickly actually, I think she's worried about Harry."

"What about her kids?"

“I think they’re fine. Iris is in the school; Radian is training for Fission.”

“Really?”

“Yes, they both want to be soldiers.”

“They’re around your age, are they not? Why don’t you try and become friends with them.”

“They aren’t as smart as me.”

Tom rose an eyebrow at him. “Who is going to be as smart as you besides me and Gamma?”

“No one, probably,” Neuro shrugs his shoulders. “But I don’t want to be friends with them.”

“If not them, then Sibyl. She’s around your age. Also, they’re going to be in our quarters so it might be a good idea to communicate with them. They’ll be people you’ll be able to socialise with.” Neuro rolled his eyes, leaning back on the bed. Tom turned his attention to Francisca. “Do you know what happened with the rebels in 13?”

Neuro tells him. “Gamma is working with Esteven on the technology with me. Personally, I think we’re the smartest people in 13. Andy and Teddy are in Fission. Dean is working with the propaganda team. Crick has been promoted to Head General of the Soldiers. Meios is conversing with Kingsley, Grindelwald, and Delia. Spice and Cornelia are working on the creation of new nuclear weapons to use. Additionally, Gamma has been made a pilot due to her skills.”

“Interesting…” he sighs at the beep of his schedule. “I have to go.”

Stripping quickly out of the clothes, Francisca seeing him naked a lot of times, and Neuro - basically like his brother at this point, Tom reclothes himself and puts the training boots on. He waved goodbye to them and headed downstairs to F4, Room 2. Once he arrived, he found himself intrigued by all the people he knew inside. Sirius, Amelia, Andromeda, Ted, Dean, Nathaniel, Hermione, Ron, Fred, George, and Ginny. The two siblings stood before them, heading over when they saw Tom. “Soldier Riddle,” they began - which sounded weird on their tongues, their accent horrific. “It’s lovely to meet you.”

He shook their hands and awkwardly ignored the rest of the stares the others were giving him. The man gestured to him, “I’m Lynx Fission,

Soldier L.Fission, and this is my younger sister." "Circe Fission, Soldier C.Fission. We run the Fission - where only the best are trained for combat. From Grindelwald," they didn't call him anything like father? —or even his first name?—that was weird, "we've heard that you won't join the Fission but that you'll train with us. We aren't going to ask for any answers, we know our father's word is best, but we'd like to introduce you to our soldiers nonetheless."

L.Fission comments, "your uniform is darker than ours."

Tom shrugs his shoulders. "I know, I don't know what to make of it."

The two exchanged a look before walking back to the front of the soldiers. "Everyone, I'd like you to meet Soldier Riddle. Others might know him as Tom Riddle but in 13, soldiers are only referred to as their formal names rather than their informal names unless they're family." C.Fission tells the group. There were about fifty people there, all of the strongest variety. Tom imagined them like they were demigods that did their own missions because they were trustworthy and trained enough to be independent without orders.

Nathaniel gestured his arm at him and surprisingly, Tom went to stand next to him. Neither said anything, listening to the instructions the two Fission siblings were giving out to them. After telling them to warm up, that they were to go on a five kilometre endurance jog and afterwards work out in the specifically designed gym that will help with their specific types of skill types - Nathaniel laid down beside Tom, and the two did the same warmups everyone else was doing. It was a bit weird for Tom to see, despite this. Nathaniel began to murmur. "I heard we were to sleep in private quarters this evening," he breathed. "You're not doing it?"

"I was asked for seven names. I put Harry's down, Neuro's, Francisca's - then I decided your family would be best for the other room I received. Harry would want you to have it." Nathaniel beamed in his direction. "You were chosen to be in Fission?"

"Not much of another choice. I'm fit - always have been so it's best to do this."

"And your sisters?"

"Sibyl's too young for war, forteen and over the age, but she's turning forteen next year so she'll join the training for the war then. Abelene picked to go into medicine. Found her passions more vibrant there. So she's an undergrad medic at the moment. She will get promoted in a

year's time or so considering her age until she's a fully fledged doctor. I'm quite proud, actually. So…" Nathaniel and Tom changed their exercise. "Do we know what's happening with Harry yet?"

Tom sighs, "once I convince the Districts of his innocence then we'll get him."

Nathaniel's eyes widened. "What?"

"Yes, I know. I wasn't thrilled with that either."

"Can't you do anything about it. You were Commander of the Capitol?"

"I'm eighteen. It's less than a thrilling spot to be."

"Almost nineteen; and next year you're twenty."

Nathaniel said that as if it meant something but in the eyes of 13, someone had to do more things and have more battle wins underneath their belt than just be a title. That didn't have any merit. The two began to jog together, at the same pace, continuing to converse with one another. "Abelene has been put with the task of trying to recover some of the victors from the Games. Hermione was quick to recover so it's why she's here, but Hero and Cho aren't dealing with the whole situation well at all unlike Esteven."

"Esteven has children here," Tom pointed out. "Family. Cho's died in the arena. Hero is alone amongst people he tried to kill. Of course, he wouldn't be doing well with the situation. Although, you have to keep in mind - Hero, Cho, Cedric, Gleam, probably Esteven, could've been Harry—" his eyes go wide, gulping down the thought of him being sexually assaulted at the Capitol, that instance "were all sexually abused by the Capitol."

"What… really?" Nathaniel's eyes widened, "does that mean Harry—"

"Don't think about it too much, I don't know. I hope not and I will kill anyone who does."

The teenager's eyes grow darker beside him. "I will too."

Tom continues to speak about Hero and Cho. "It's not only the mental abuse they've had to endure from the Capitol, it's the losses of their families, and what they've gone through from the Capitol. Harry told me that Hero wasn't dealing with any of the sexual abuse well, which

is fair enough, since the previous year was his first — and now, only. But victors aren't treated fairly at all, I know when it comes to any sex they have to endure from the Capitol. They're sold, basically from the Capitol the highest payers. The prettiest ones get the worst of the abuse."

"So they get no choice in the decision?"

"No, not at all." Tom knits his eyebrows together. "Unless you want your family dead it is."

Nathaniel's eyebrows quirk at the comment.

Tom explains himself. "From what I know from my childhood about the matter is that it started to occur around the 50th Hunger Games when this was implemented. Dumbledore's idea. Remus was the first tribute suited for this, but instead not to. As a result, he killed his family in an accident, and was made the example of victors in the future. They got to pick their fates between sexual abuse or the deaths of their loved ones - and a lot choose the abuse because once two weeks every year didn't sound so bad compared to the deaths."

"Fuck, I want to killed Dumbledore."

"Murdering him is what I should've done years ago."

"Poison?"

"He's a catious fuck." Tom jogged. "For years he swallows poison with an antidote he created. I could've tried but there would've been no point. There are guards at his bedroom door at all times whilst he's inside. Realistically, there's no way to kill him except if the internal Capitol begins to crumble down. Then, he's vulnerable because no one would protect him." Nathaniel nods along and before they know it, the five kilometre jog was over but Tom and Nathaniel were dying by the end of it. So were most of the newbies as well. "Oh fuck, I've never felt like dying more than now."

Nathaniel laughed an airy faint chuckle. "Good to know you're like the rest of us."

Afterwards, they got up and began to train their muscles on the machines provided. Their workout spanned two hours in total. By seven forty-five, they were all done. Nathaniel and Tom walked out together. Sirius, following behind them. He wanted to show them their living quarters. Tom leaned against the door as Francisca

welcomed them in. Nathaniel glanced around, finding the place to be big enough to live in. Tom turned his attention to Sirius who was observing it. “You can stay with Remus if you really want, no one is going to berate you for not being here.”

Sirius nods once at him, content. “Thanks, kid.”

Tom glared at him. “I’m not a kid.”

“You’re still a teenager. I’d say that still considers you a kid in my eyes.”

Sirius ruffled his hair, Tom wanting to murder him at that moment but Sirius stopped and told Nathaniel that he was going to head downstairs to see how Abelene and Sibyl were doing. Nathaniel accepted it and awed at the workbook Francisca showed him, “this looks great.” Holding up both his hands towards Tom as if he was taking a picture of him, looking at the various angles on him. Nathaniel nodded his head back at Francisca. “I can see Tom wearing these.”

“Yes, we’re good, aren’t they?” Francisca frowns. “You two should have a shower before dinner.”

Nathaniel told Tom to go first whilst he discussed her designs some more. Not arguing, he went into their joint bathroom and began to wash himself with the warm water they had. Afterwards, he entered the bedroom naked, Nathaniel squawking in surprise at seeing him nude, and Tom ignored him. “I have sisters, Tom! You can’t just walk out naked like this.”

He shrugged his shoulders. “As if anything would happen between me and them.”

“That’s not the issue!”

“What—is it you, then?”

Francisca laughed and Tom changed into a new pair of clothes. Nathaniel gaped, rolling his eyes at Tom but he noticed the way his eyes reddened. Grumbling, he headed to the bathroom and put his training clothes into the washing basket the other cleans were going to take and wash later in the day. Once Nathaniel returned, clothed - having access to the other room, the three began to walk back downstairs to where dinner would be held. Nathaniel walked, complaining beside him. “I have sisters, you cannot walk out nude.”

Tom shrugged his shoulders. “Didn’t we all swim basically in our underwear that one time?”

Nathaniel smacked a hand to his head. “That’s different! You’re walking around naked.”

“Anyone would want to see me nude.”

“You’re not getting the point.”

“I think I am, Harry made a great choice — didn’t he?”

Nathaniel glared at him, pointing a finger at him. “Now, you little shit.”

Tom and Nathaniel argued back and forth on the issue about the complexities of walking around naked. Tom’s argument was that his body can’t be used against him if he does walk around naked - free and accepting of the choice, and Nathaniel’s argument based on the fact he wasn’t going to have his body used against him - and that he should cover up. Although, Tom thinks Nathaniel is more the problem than his sisters. Even if he had a girlfriend, apparently, which was the argument he used against Tom’s accusation for him liking his nude self more than his sisters ever would. Apparently, Abelene was pining after some other adult — Ness, or something, and they speculated Sibyl liked women more than she liked men so realistically… Tom gave a pointed look at Nathaniel as he stuck his tongue at him back. Definitely somewhat attracted to him, regardless, Harry was the only one for him so he wasn’t interested.

The teenagers entered the cafeteria and grabbed their food from the line. Tom and Nathaniel glared down at the food prepared for him, turning his head slightly with his eyes still on the mush, he asked. “Is this really edible?”

Nathaniel wrinkled his nose. “Yes.”

“Do I have to eat this?”

“They’re not going to give you any other alternatives.”

“Ah fuck,” Tom grumbles. “Alright, let’s see how this tastes then.”

Grabbing the fork and digging into the slop, he tasted it and digested it. He gritted his teeth, nodding, knowing it was distasteful. He tried not to gag. “I hate District 13,” Tom commented. “All their awful

accents, all the bright lethal lights, all the sleeping arrangements, all their self-sufficient attitudes, just everything. Even the food, the pressure of being useful. This sucks."

Nathaniel agreed with him, sighing. "Yeah, I hear you."

They ate their food and Tom's eyes widened when he saw Gamma and Neuro come up for dinner. The two came and joined them at their table. He finished what disgust he was consuming and turned his body to them. "How was the weaponry?" Neuro tilted his head as if he was debating it. Gamma shrugged her shoulders. "It was okay. Not much to comment about it in all honesty."

"And Esteven?" Nathaniel asked.

"She's alright. A genius woman."

"I was wondering about heading down there tomorrow to get fitted for my uniform," Nathaniel told the group. "As well as my weapons — if you guys are down there, I'll be able to see you. With the new lot of people, has there been enough for everyone?" Gamma says that replicating outfits isn't the issue, it's creating unique outfits like Tom's that are hard to design. Tom asked if it was like Francisca's sketches and she nodded her head, saying it was a mixture of design and usability. Apparently his weapon was unique, a type of gun that fired with bullet-flames which would be interesting to see how it is put to use in the battlefield, with additional add-ons.

Gamma notices something behind him, her eyes widening. "I've got to go, bye."

She takes off as if she's afraid. Neuro groans, leaning his head against the table. "Not again."

Tom rose his eyebrow before he felt someone tapping his shoulder. "Soldier Riddle?"

It was a young girlish voice. Turning his head, he found Iris Blue Graves standing behind him with a beaming face with her older brother behind her. He appeared to have a matching expression to Neuro, manoeuvring himself to take a seat where Gamma previously sat. "Yes?" He asked the victor's daughter. Except, she only gave him a hug instead, kissing his cheek. Blinking in absolute confusion, he turned his head and coughed. "Uh, what was that for?"

"Iris," Radian grumbled, shaking his head. "Don't traumatise him."

“What?” She pouted in his direction. “I wanted to thank him for saving our mother!”

Nathaniel nudged Tom, laughing at him to which he responded with a heavy look of disgust. Iris turned back around to him and Tom nodded his head back at her. “Uh, it wasn’t a problem, kid.” She hugged him around the shoulders again. Sighing in defeat and accepted the love the little girl was giving him, he stared down at the food presented before him with angst. He was so tired. Nathaniel tapped her shoulder, saying. “I think Tom has had a pretty hard time today. I think the last thing he wants to deal with is a lot of hugs, Iris. Maybe another time.”

Tom bit back, “or having to complain about what I can’t do in my private living quarters.”

“Oh, we are not beginning this argument again.”

Soon enough, their table grew double the size. Abelene, Sibyl, and a friend they had made from 13, Eris, joined them. Then, Ginny, Ron, Hermione, the Twins, Charlie, Bill, Molly, and Arthur came and sat down with them. Tom and Nathaniel talked about Neuro’s friendship with Radian, Iris who took a seat beside Tom, Abelene, Sibyl, and now Eris - for him to socialise with. Nathaniel said he’d discuss it with his sisters how they’d make friends with him when Tom said anything to do with games, Neuro loves. Card-games, video-games. Anything game related. It wasn’t long before they finished with all their food and headed back to their living quarters. Changing into his pyjamas which Nathaniel yelled at him whilst Francisca hung out with the three girls, Eris joining them for the night, Neuro laughed at the whole situation.

Tom glared at him and shouted back, it wouldn’t be an issue if he didn’t look, and he dressed in his cotton sleepwear. Sitting outside, leaning his head against the railing as the two other boys changed, he watched everyone still work the night shift walk around to get where they were supposed to go. Sibyl tapped him on the shoulder. “How are you?”

“I feel like that’s what everyone is asking me nowadays.”

“And, I heard you can only get Harry back if you’re able to convince the Districts to side with us.”

“It will take months - I need to come up with a better debate for Grindelwald to take me on.”

She sighed, sitting down beside him. “I think you’re stressed and overthinking it. Tomorrow, nothing will change so you can think about it more then - but for now. Do you have any ideas for what you’re going to do with the propaganda?” Tom shrugged his shoulders. “No good ideas have hit me yet.”

“Why don’t you talk about District 12 and the bombings there?”

He paused and thought about the suggestion. “You think I should take a group of people there and discuss District 12.” Sibyl smiled, nodding her head, thinking. She told him, “perhaps about the different aspects of the District. You’d speak last because what you have to say is the most important but if you take Nathaniel and Ron to speak about what happened that night of the bombing, Hermione to speak about the District before she left, and you to speak about the District when you came to hang out with Harry. Perhaps you can create a small documentary of what really happened to District 12 and send it out to the Districts.”

Tom thought that was a great idea. Grabbing out a notebook from one of the cupboards, he returned to the girls room and sat on one of the beds with Sibyl on one side, Abelene on the other—watching what the two of them were doing. “You should start it at the Justice Building. Quite poetic, I’d think.”

The Justice Building, then the fence where they escaped, the forest, the lake, circling back to where the bar was where the Marauders played and ending the video at Victor’s Village. Sibyl wrote a few scribbles of things they could talk about and the different scenery. Abelene pointed out that they should wear clothes to roll up if they wanted to dip their legs in the water and talk about the lake. Tom leaned his head against the wall and thought about that morning in the Spring where the two escaped early in the morning and went to the lake. Tom flushed, glancing down at his engagement ring. Harry—he was going to save him no matter what it took.

Neuro and Nathaniel joined their group, the teenagers all discussing the video clips they could make from the cameo of District 12. Sibyl decided she was getting too bored watching him do that, so she asked Neuro and Eris if they wanted to play cards with her. She taught them a District 12 game as Nathaniel, Tom, and Abelene went over the ideas for the propaganda. It wasn’t long before he fell asleep, Nathaniel, and Abelene lying next to him.

———

Dumbledore was on the screen in District 13, all of them watching him at breakfast. He was wearing his best outfit, standing all to the screen, with a card in his hand. Tom felt lethal, seething in his seat. The basic information Dumbledore relayed in the video was that all images and discussions of the arena were banned. And any association with Tom Riddle was to be met with death. He narrowed his eyebrows at the screen before glancing back down at his food. Nathaniel shrugged his shoulders from the screen. “Hey, look. I’m sure we were bound to be dead anyway so I don’t think associating with you is going to do much damage.”

“Yeah,” Iris chirped, pointing her spoon at him. “We’re going to support you no matter what!”

“Thanks, Iris.”

He ate his breakfast sullenly, glancing down at his schedule.

8 Wake up
9 Breakfast
10 Meeting F8.R5
12 Lunch
3.30 Training F4.R2
5.30 Training F4.R1
8.30 Dinner
10 Bedtime

Nathaniel was busy with battle strategy classes in the morning before training with a lot of the other members from Fission. Instead, Tom had meetings and other duties to uphold. Heading up to Floor 8, he found himself glancing around inside of the fifth room. Until Grindelwald and Kingsley entered the room. “Hello, Soldier Riddle,” Grindelwald commended. “I wanted to know if you had any ideas so far about the propaganda.”

Tom nodded his head at him. “Actually, I do.”

Grindelwald took a seat, Kingsley sitting next to him. “Oh yes? Do share.”

He kept standing and passed them the notebook he had since the previous night. “With the help of some of Harry’s friends, we came up with the idea to show Panem what happened to District 12 the night after the Games. We wanted to show the Districts how the Capitol is unfair and what was there before the rubble. I was thinking if I took Nathaniel Croseph, Ron Weasley, Hermione Granger and myself with

a team of camera crew, we would be able to capture the essence of District 12 — the untouched bits and what was really the life in the District. With Harry, with the escapade to District 13, everything. What are your thoughts?"

Kingsley hummed at the notes. "I like this."

Grindelwald frowned. "And this is going to convince the Districts how?"

"I was thinking the small details would sing to them." Tom unclipped his necklace and on the necklace was the copy of Harry's ring. He took off his engagement ring, putting them both onto the table. "These are our engagement rings. This is Harry's copy in case something happens to the one he's wearing. I was thinking that if we were able to explore District 12 as if we were documenting our first visit after the attack, then perhaps people would understand the greater picture of Harry Potter."

"And what involvement do you have with District 12?"

"I was there for a month. Remember when I was offline and Gamma had to take over. That was last October. I have a lot of memories running around District 12 - with Harry, and sneaking around. I'm quite sure I'll be able to capture the essence of being in-love with District 12 because it's Harry's home." Grindelwald nodded his head at the notes.

"I think if that's all for now, it's a good starting point."

"I also want to be on the battlefield." Tom told Grindelwald, who rose an eyebrow at the comment. "I know, I'm more useful here than there but no Capitol-citizen would ever step foot onto the battlefield unless they were serious about helping. Understanding the soldiers, and trying to win the little battles. If they want to take my betrayal even harder, becoming a soldier and climbing the ranks would achieve my goal better than anything else."

Kingsley tilted his head, pointing at Tom. "This is him." Grindelwald turns his head to him. "This is not the President's successor we're seeing—this is the rebel leader who is devoted to the cause. I told you this is who we needed, not only the ex-President's successor. Nobody wants someone who is useless, after all, so this is who we need, Commander."

"Mhm… I will take this into consideration. You're dismissed, Soldier

Riddle. We'll take the next step forward with this document of the ruins of District 12 running in the meantime." Tom nods his head at the Commander, leaving the meeting room. Glancing down at his schedule, he had two hours before lunch. Deciding, because he was bored, to head towards the hospital and speak with Abelene who would be there. He ran into someone, tripping over.

"I—I'm sorry," the small voice began.

Turning to who said it, it was Hero Ferror. Although, Tom could barely recognise him.

His hair was a disaster, the teenager seemingly pulling out clumps of it, and his face appeared to be struck with fear at seeing him. Tom's face softened before standing up without complaint, this was the teenage boy who Harry wanted to save. He would take his word for face-value, but sometimes Tom thinks Harry saves people because they're the weak ones. "Hey," Tom gently took his hands. "It's alright." It's certainly not alright but he wasn't about to scare him even more than he was already. "Are you okay?"

"I need to go—I need to get out of—"

"Hey," he tightened his hands softly, narrowing his eyebrows at the teenager. "Let's go sit out over here, okay?"

Heading in the opposite direction of the hospital, Tom made his way to the balcony where Hero would be able to get some more air than suffocating inside of a hospital. Tom noticed where his tracker was taken out, stitches bleeding. He didn't touch them, only his hands. "I'm guessing the hospital is overwhelming to sit still in there." Hero didn't look at Tom but he nodded slightly. Tom thought he was out of it completely when he began to vomit on him, but the teenager must be extremely distressed if he felt like vomiting and hyperventilating was the answer.

Tom held Hero ever so softly, not knowing what to do as he shuttered and couldn't breathe. "Hey," he kept one hand on his wrist, the other on his cheek. "It's okay. It's really okay to not be okay." Tom was never the one to comfort someone but he thinks living with Neuro has taught him a few things about how to comfort someone in this state. Perhaps, not this bad, but just uncontrollably crying in the first place. "Breathing slows your heart-rate down," Tom told him. "It's just breathing in for three seconds, releasing for another four…" he knitted his eyebrows together. "I can do it with you?"

Tom didn't know what was happening with the teenager but he decided to try and teach him how to breathe again since he was struggling. Afterwards, once the teenager was able to calm down again, he collapsed on top of Tom. Fortunately enough, he was still breathing calmly if somewhat uneven and Tom picked him back up and took him back inside of the hospital. He was light, unlike his first opinion of the Career. A nurse's eyes widened when he saw Hero in his arms. "Mr. Ferrors. Soldier Riddle, what happened?"

"He ran out of the hospital whilst I was coming in — then he vomited on me and started hyperventilating. I got him to calm down after a while, but…" Tom frowned. "I don't think he's doing well. You should try and find him a psychiatrist."

She sighs, "I know we've tried but he doesn't want to talk to anyone."

Tom thought quickly. "Why don't you try someone around his age? I think he hasn't had any good experiences with adults with… perplexing differences. Like the Capitol, and I'm sure he's unused to the adults in District 13. Maybe someone from District 12 or a younger learning psychiatrist, perhaps? I think Miss Croseph would be able to assist if I was to think on the forefront of my mind."

"Miss Croseph… why?"

"She would be able to understand his troubles I think and she's younger, from the Districts. Additionally, she has connections to Harry that I think Hero would be able to understand." The nurse takes it into consideration as he places Hero back down on his private hospital room's bed. The teenager appears restless. "He harbours a lot of trauma. I think with my experiences with Miss Croseph, she would be able to assist."

"Well see, Soldier Riddle. Did you have any particular reason for coming here?"

"No, I didn't."

"Alright, we'll send you off then."

Tom had the propaganda accepted, telling Nathaniel, Ron, Hermione, and the rest of the table the plan at lunch. They were somewhat put-off by the prospect of returning to District 12 but Hermione was enthused to do it for the cause. Francisca said that she was going to

detach the pendant on Tom's necklace so he could hang the two rings clear, announcing to the world they were engaged. Training wasn't anything different but the two Fission siblings kept looking at him funny. He ignored it and spoke to Nathaniel about some of the best moments to talk about.

Later that night, after he had a shower, Nathaniel complained about the fact he was naked again but Tom couldn't really care and Abelene returned from her shift excited — whispering to Sibyl before making their way over to Tom. He was still half-naked without his t-shirt on, before she told him about the infant section of the hospital. "Do you want to come see? There was a birth tonight."

"Are we allowed to?" Tom asked, tilted his head at them.

"We can look through the glass at the newborns. Sometimes the kids even get permission to hold them." It wasn't long before Tom, Nathaniel, Abelene, Neuro (Sibyl dragging him along) and Sibyl all headed to the hospital and to the infant ward. There, through the glass about twenty other children and teenagers watched the little kids — all in their pyjamas, Tom noticed.

Looking through the glass, the infants were tiny. Tom didn't know if he wanted kids. Before, he never wanted kids, and with Harry - he knew he couldn't biologically but kids who were orphaned like them or parents who had given them away… he didn't know if he could become a parent like that even. Staring at them, a nurse came out from the side. She wasn't the one Tom saw the previous day but she appeared to notice him immediately. Giving him a kind smile, she asked. "Do you want to hold one?"

"Do mothers allow this?"

"Oh no," she shakes her head. "There are three little ones who lost their parents so we let the kids play with them." Deciding from that information, he would, the nurse — Theli, brought out a month old child for him to hold. Harry's friends circled around him as he held the baby, Theli bringing out the other two for some of the other kids to hold. Sitting on the chairs they had for the kids of District 13, he sat in one and held who one of the other kids called, Fornax.

Holding Fornax was something like he's never done before. The little boy drooled in his sleep, one of the most adorable things he's ever seen. He was nervous to hold him, never holding a baby before but Nathaniel confirmed that he was doing well. He had dark skin - darker

than Harry's and black hair. He was seriously one of the cutest things he's ever laid his eyes on. However, after a few minutes, he passed Fornax onto Nathaniel. When he held the baby, Nathaniel glanced back at him. "Don't you want to hold him for a little longer?"

"I would drop him," Tom said as an excuse.

"You wouldn't. You don't make mistakes like that. What's wrong?"

Tom narrowed his eyes to his hands. "I don't think I'd make a good parent."

Nathaniel glares at him, pinching his skin on his leg with his free hand softly. Tom jumped in pain. "What makes you think I'd be a good parent? What makes you think Abelene or Sibyl or Neuro would make a good parent? We're eighteen, they're younger. And lots of shit has happened to us. The only person who I'd know for sure would make a good parent would be Harry, because he's still insanely kind after everything but even then, looking after another human being would be a big deal to him. Don't think about whether you'd make a good parent or not — think about whether you're able to create a world for these little kids who don't, or for the parents who will come after the war. This is for not only the past, the war, but for the future."

Abelene nudged Nathaniel with a soft smile. "Aren't you becoming poetic?"

"Oh shut up, Abelene."

Chapter End Notes

*loml wasn't originally for this chapter (not at all in the chapter titles) but I think it works.
Babies, loss of Harry, etc... anyway.
Sorry guys, not posting until next Sunday; only 1 chapter today, I'mma hustling in real life

P S

this is me trying & So Long London

Chapter Notes

Posted: 15th of June, 2024
So... it's been a little while. Enjoy this chapter! <3333

See the end of the chapter for more notes

They abandoned the car.

Narcissa screamed, running through the rain and towards where Andromeda said District 13 was. Lucius ran besides her, Bella shouting out curses at her and the people chasing after them. Mathis wasn't happy. None of them where as they kept slipping in the mud, the pouring rain drowning them in their clothes. She was out of breath, but kept running. They had to be almost on the doorsteps of District 13. Her nose was bleeding profusely but she didn't do anything to stop it. "Ah fuck! Fuck you shits!" Bella screamed, Narcissa ignoring the tears that streamed from her face. She hiccuped and wiped them as they kept running.

They evaded their pursers for hours. It was four, in the morning when they began to chase after them, and the sun was beginning to lighten the scarily dark sky. She was wet and shaking from the cold, abandoned her heels, running barefoot. The four kept running through the forest, not looking back before Bella tripped. Narcissa pulled her up, the two holding hands together as they ran. Bella screamed at her, distraught. "How could you be so stupid, 'Cissa!"

"It was Tom and Andromeda who did this - not me. I wanted us to survive!"

"Girls, we need to hurry…" Mathis began.

"Shut the fuck up, Mathis!" Narcissa screamed at him.

They used the rocks to help them from slipping even if they did pierce her feet. The rain hit them harder as the day progressed and it was around noon when Narcissa felt as if she couldn't do this anymore. She couldn't keep running like this. Then, the world went dark.

Tom was asleep next to Francisca when the door bursts open.

Immediately waking up from the sound, he noticed Andromeda standing at the door - hurrying over to beside his bed. Neuro opened his eyes, glancing over to her as Francisca watched him as Tom decided to get up, sitting on the edge of the elevated bed. She began, hurried and stuck with fright. “They’re here.”

He yawned, narrowing his eyebrows at her. “Who?”

“My sisters. They are here in District 13.”

As if water had hit him, he jumped off the bed and followed her towards the hospital. Tom’s mind was racing at two hundred kilometres per hour, trying to figure out how they knew where District 13 was before it came to him that Andromeda told them where it was. Told them to come here. As it would be the safest place for them to be. Hurrying through the hospital, Tom slowed when Andromeda stopped - looking out towards the section where Narcissa was getting her feet tended to, and her nose, by another doctor, as the rest all had their conditions looked over. Bella was the first to notice them, Tom beside Andromeda. He didn’t know what to say but Bella got off from the bed, racing over and one second, he thought she was going to kiss him, the next, he was slapped and on the ground. “Ah fuck!” He held his cheek, Bella furious at him.

She pointed her long dark acyclic fingernails at him. “How dare you betray us, Tom! You are the most shocking, infuriating, disgusting, traitorous friend I’ve ever met.” He looked up at her, frightened, scared she was going to stab him with such a weapon her fingernail was. “I was your first friend at the Academy, and you decided to do us over like this? Throw us under the bus?”

“I know, perhaps, you couldn’t tell us about the traitorous things you were doing — but you could’ve told us the Capitol was going to come after us. For days now, we have to evade the peacekeepers because they kept trying to hurt us with all those weapons, Tom! And you.”

Andromeda gulped at her younger sister.

“I don’t get a word from anyone, but Narcissa did?”

“Fuck, Andromeda.” Bella knitted her eyebrows together, still pointing her finger around at them. “You could’ve told us something was happening. You could’ve given us a warning. You could’ve just been good! And we wouldn’t have had to go through all that shit. Mum, Dad? What’s going to happen to them now that you decided to fuck our family up?” Tom didn’t get up from the ground, he was too scared

too with the ferocity she was angry with. Black DNA, he thinks, is a scary thing. “You are worse than Tom, Andromeda. You’re a traitor to our blood.”

“I did it because it was the best thing to ever happen to Panem. This war is going to free everyone, Bella!” Andromeda stepped closer to her, angry. “Call me a traitor all you want, but our family was going to go to shits anyway. Tom was the only one who could understand me. He left everything for love. So did I—and I don’t regret it one bit.”

“Love…?” Bella turned to him, noticing the two engagement rings on his necklace.

“Yeah, Harry and Tom are a thing. You’ve got to catch up, Bell.” Andromeda tells her.

Tom flushed at the quick comment before standing up off the ground. Bella appeared shell-shocked at the news, Tom nodding his head. “It’s true. I… I love him and we went to 12 so I could talk to him after the Games, Bellatrix. I’m sorry.” He sighed before facing her eyes. She seemed bewildered. “And we’re engaged so… there are a lot of things you don’t know.”

Narcissa gasped. “You’re engaged!”

He blushed at the accusation. “Before the Games, I proposed.”

The youngest of the Blacks hurried over and gave him a big hug, before pointing one of her sharp fingernails at him. “You’ve got to tell us everything Tom. We’re your friends, I won’t allow you to shut us out again. You were such a mess before everything came undone.” Then, Narcissa frowned softly, glancing around the hospital. “… you didn’t get him out.”

“I tried, Narcissa.” He shook his head, dazed. “I really did try.”

“You did well. I bet Harry wanted the others retrieved and you did it. But what happened?”

“Long story… we should discuss this whilst you get your feet and nose healed.”

Narcissa reluctantly agreed, Tom sitting next to her and Bella at the edge of the hospital bed whilst Lucius and Mathis turned their bodies to hear the explanation from the start. Tom told them where he first met Harry, at the orphanage he was adopted from before he was the

President's successor and how Harry was his first friend - and how they had each other's backs before anyone else did. Narcissa cooed when he told them about how they would do everything together day and night, and would comfort each other when they had nightmares even if Harry didn't talk. He didn't talk because he didn't want to spill his secrets.

Tom spoke about how he cared for Harry long after he was gone and never knew whether or not he would see him again, but grew into the position the President created for him. His successor. Then, Narcissa answered what happened next. "Harry was reaped." Tom nodded that yes, the next thing that happened that changed all his plans was that he was reaped and Tom recognised him instantly — because of his dark curls, tanned skin, and gleaming green eyes like jade gemstones that were unforgettable. Bella sighed and said yes, he was unforgettable all right.

Then, he lied about the project and told them how yes, his internship didn't end up happening, but he didn't care about that anyway because he was so focused on saving Harry. Then, all the things that happened before the Games… Narcissa asked what happened with Barty because somehow he seemed involved with it, and Harry, and Tom didn't want to speak with him after.

Tom whispered in her ear what happened, Narcissa's eyes widening. Shocked. "Really?"

Then, anger snapped into place. "I'm going to kill Barty."

"What happened?" Bella questioned, Andromeda listening intently.

Narcissa swiped her hand. "I'll tell you later."

Then, he told them how he lied about being on a mission - training to become the President, which Harry then told everyone else when rumours of the two of them broke out, and how after he returned from District 12, Dumbledore banned Tom from seeing him. Which led to a devastatingly small conversation at the Capitol during his Victory Tour — but back to the rebellion. After Harry won the Games, Tom stayed with him and took care of him, when Andromeda found out about his feelings for Harry throughout and asked him if he wanted to come to this thing.

Tom accepted and he was in a rebellion meeting within the Capitol. Narcissa shouted at Andromeda before the two were stopped by Tom continuing with the story. How he ended up joining, wanting to do so

for Harry, knowing he was never going to be on the Capitol's side and how it was a sacrifice he was willing to make for him. Narcissa took his hand and stroked it softly, frowning at the story. It felt like years ago, that's how much the experience aged him. Then, how Tom made plans to see him again in District 12.

"District 12's gone." Bella whispered. "Did people make it out alive?"

"Three thousand did." Tom explained to her. "Harry predicted the events when the next Games were announced. Hermione was picked to be the female tribute by him, training alongside him, and Ron and Nathaniel, his two friends, were trained to get everyone out. Everyone is useful because District 13 couldn't possibly hold the entire District underground."

"How did they choose?" Narcissa appeared flabbergasted with her mouth held wide.

"Like I said; based on usefulness. Babies, children, teenagers, mothers, and young adults were immediately accepted into the amount. The only older adults who survived were the ones who had something to offer, like being able to hunt, cook, gather, lead, or clean. Even then, a lot were cut off. All the Marauders survived," Tom said to the group, "all the musical instruments were smuggled out and they're now in District 13 with all their musicians. We couldn't leave culture to die like that." Narcissa bursted out crying.

Tom rubbed her back consolingly as she leaned her head to his neck. "It's so sad that this all happened to us. I wish we could turn back the clock."

Andromeda snapped at her sister. "And what?—let the Games keep killing twenty-three tributes and have the victors raped unless they wanted their families and friends to die, Narcissa?" Narcissa glanced up, mortified at the words Andromeda was yelling at her. Tom didn't know what to say. She turned to him, "was Harry?"

"Not before the Games," he tells her, weakly. "I don't know about after. I really don't want to know."

"… so all our beloved victors?"

"Everyone after Remus Lupin, but he was the example of what would happen if someone were to decline the offer of the President. His parents died. So did his younger sister." Tom bit his bottom lip. "Hero's suffering badly because of what happened to him. I don't even

want to know about Cho because I haven't seen her yet, but Cedric died in the arena - her boyfriend." When Tom focused on the other people inside of their hospital room, there were a lot of the sick and injured who were listening to his stories. He sighed, twisting the rings on the chain. "From now on, we have to move forward. There's no way to turn back the clock and it's not as if we want to. We've got to save Harry, Gleam, and Ceres - and stop the Hunger Games for good."

Narcissa nodded her head. "Do you want to become District 13 citizens?" Tom asked.

"Are you?" Her eyebrow rose in his direction.

"I am. So is Andromeda and Ted."

"… and we abandon mother and father?" Bella asks. "Why?"

Narcissa points a finger at Bella. "They accepted their fate, Bell. I asked them repeatedly to come. I was about to push them into the car, but you wouldn't have come with us if I had done that. You would've immediately known something was up. Bella, nobody is going to want them free if they come here. They're as bad as the President. Everyone knows the Blacks and what they've done to help the Capitol to reach the absolute growth and luxury it has. We're not good people." She sighs, whispering to Tom. "I'm hormonal, sorry."

Tom whispered back. "Are you on your period? We can get your pads or tampons if you need."

"No," she frowned, gulping. "I'm pregnant."

Immediately, his eyes widened. "Really?—Is it a good thing?"

Narcissa shook her head in a manner which said yes. He turned his head to Lucius and he seemed to immediately know what was up. Narcissa smiled sadly, saying. "I didn't want to tell anyone until we got here. I certainly didn't want our parents to know, y'know." Tom said, yes, he could understand why she didn't. Bella, Andromeda, and Mathis were confused at the conversation that was happening behind her words.

She exhaled before announcing. "I'm pregnant."

"What?" Andromeda yelped. "You are."

"Mhm, I knew when I saw you."

“I’m going to be an aunt,” Bella whispered. “Oh my fucking lord!”

“Language,” one of the nurses said whilst passing the girls.

Bella glared at her, “my sister is having a baby. It’s a worthy celebration.”

Mathis shook Lucius’ hand before shaking Narcissa’s, saying congratulations to both. Tom asked if they knew what they were going to name their son or daughter yet. Narcissa flushed, touching her stomach gently. Lucius spoke up as if they had spoken about it. “It’s not official or anything yet, but before this whole disaster happened. We were thinking about naming our son Draco Scorpii Black-Malfoy. And if we had a girl, Selena Lyra Black-Malfoy. However, we’re still not sure. We’re going to have to discuss it further.”

“Constellation names,” Andromeda pointed out. “Gorgeous.”

“Thank you,” Narcissa beamed.

“You haven’t met everyone.” Tom said. “You only met who they acted around in front of you. Harry’s friends are quite different around people who know about us and who don’t. You should reintroduce yourselves to them when you’re discharged from the hospital.” He frowned, pursing his lips before explaining. “You guys are going to have to get used to doing a bunch of work. District 13 is all about being useful.”

“What jobs are there?” Bella asked.

“Depends,” Andromeda debated, bobbing her head. “You would be good as a teacher on battle strategy though, Bella. Taking the class with Tom.”

“What’s Tom’s job?”

“Uh… I’ve got a few. I’m a soldier and propaganda creator.”

They asked what that was supposed to mean and Tom began to explain the situation. How he was supposed to convince and manipulate the Districts to band together—and convince everyone of Harry’s innocence. Narcissa stood up from the bed and began to pace. “I’m going to kill him, he can’t do that. He should go and get Harry.”

“Who? Grindelwald?” Andromeda questioned her.

“Yes! Tom and Harry have done so much already for the cause. I think at the very least they deserve to be together. If he’s going to do jack-shit to help Harry and have to do all the work, I don’t think he’s a good leader then. Tom doesn’t have to prove anything.” Narcissa stands up tall and Tom wipes a few stray tears that leave his eyes. “Harry is a blessing and Tom’s presence here has already proven enough. He should go send a team to get him before something bad happens to him. I don’t want Harry to be sexually assaulted or tortured or to die! I don’t want to think about that. And he’s being selfish if he’s not getting him.”

Andromeda and Narcissa began to argue.

Bella sighed, holding a hand to her head before turning to Tom.

“We’ll save him, Tom. Don’t you worry. I’m going to be a soldier like you underneath your regime.”

“I don’t have a group, Bella.” He explains. “I’m only eighteen; they won’t permit it.”

“Then, we’ll convince them.”

The propaganda in District 12 was planned for the day after the fiasco with his Capitol friends.

Nathaniel sighed on the aircraft as they headed to District 12, Hermione and Ron with them. Tom listened to what Nathaniel had to complain about. “Those sisters are like bull-ants. Penetrate atrocious pain to the people who have wronged them. They’re so loyal to family and lethal to anyone they dislike, and they don’t like each other.” Nathaniel groans. “Narcissa looked as if she was about to smother me in hugs, Bellatrix appeared ready to stab me, and Andromeda—I’m not even going to touch on the older sister. I would feel as if some dark magic would latch onto me if I did. Anyway, if I ever get drunk around them in the future, please hold me down on a leash. I do not want to around their wrath.”

“I can do that.” Tom allows.

“Thank you. I will sleep better at night.”

Hermione glances up at the dot points Sibyl and Tom created for her. It wasn’t about anything specific, just about things she could talk

about, with the camera crew who escaped from the Capitol; Avian, Prometheus, Salus, and Nereus. They made sure their cameras were working as Hermione spoke up. “So you would like to talk to me about before the Hunger Games?”

Tom explained why he picked the role for her. “Since you're the victor of the 75th Annual Hunger Games and 3rd Quarter Quell,” she seemed to preen at that acknowledgment, “people are going to want to hear from you what happened before the Hunger Games that made you want to volunteer. I don’t want to hear about Harry telling you this and that whole story. I want you to explain things that happened before that, how you and Harry met, your involvement in the community, things that stood out to you as if you were someone who had come from the Capitol. What you’d notice, and things you appreciate. Although, I’d say keep your achievements from school and anything you’ve done to stand out. The audience will be able to infer it.”

“And what would I talk about if Nathaniel is going to do most of the talking about the escape prior to the fire-bombs?” Ron asked, scratching his cheek nervously as if he didn’t think he belonged there. Being friends with Hermione — who liked to gloat and Harry — who was a natural person to stand out, would’ve made him feel a bit unnecessary, but either way, his role was important.

Tom gestured to Nathaniel. “Nathaniel has familial relations to Harry as everyone knows not, yes, but you don’t. He will talk mostly from a lie about where the prediction came from since we don’t want Harry to get into any more trouble than he is with the Capitol, so that’s his job. Your job is to talk about the perspective of a rebellious family. Maybe Nathaniel could talk about it, but then Harry would get hurt via association. But your family, they’re safe in District 13. If you talk about your knowledge of the forest — how you would escape during the summer, chopping wood profusely in the winter to protect both your family and community, things that would make you associated with the forest and a reliable person. It’s not only going to make you sound more understanding, but united.”

“The whole point of this is to unite the Districts. With this documentary of sorts—we are uniting forces about what District 12 was and still is to Panem. Who Harry is and why he’s such a big deal to the rebellion that I’d betray everything. Even underground, you’re still fighting.”

“You mean us, mate.” Ron told him, confident. “You're one of us

now.”

Tom flushed, nodding reluctantly at his comment. “I suppose so.”

“Don’t discredit yourself. If Harry could become one within the District, so can you.” Nathaniel nudged his shoulder with his own, Tom meeting his eyes. He felt so odd being here, associating with them rather than Harry being there to help him, but he accepted their words for what they meant.

Tom went on. “We’re fighting even once destroyed so it means we’re setting the precedent for any other Districts that might get destroyed. That it’s not over until the flame diminishes and the war is won.” Ron nods his head sharply, smiling at him.

Hermione appeared to be focusing on what she would say, and Nathaniel told him. “I think we’ll start with me, then Hermione, then Ron, and then you. Out of the most important and interesting. Since people know me through association through Harry, I’ll start it off—people know Hermione through the Games and her status as victor, they don’t know you Ron, but with us, we’re enough credit to make your words important, and Tom. We’ll, I think you’re more than all of us - and everyone will take your word more seriously.”

“Don’t think of me as all of that. Harry was the persuasive one, haven’t you heard him sing?”

Nathaniel and Ron snickered.

They landed.

Avian got Nathaniel to stand before the Justice Building. Prometheus and Salus stooding the two different angles as Nereus made sure the sound was good. Ron, Hermione, and Tom stood behind the camera crew, watching as the camera began rolling. “District 12 is gone.” Nathaniel lowered his voice to appear more devastated for the losses. Tom had gotten to know Nathaniel better over the past few days and knows he doesn’t handle his emotions well so he was trying to sound more empathic, with the addition to his traumatised outlook of his home. “District 12 is gone to the fire-bombs that Capitol dropped on the District after the Games were destroyed. Most of the District predicted this would happen after the 3rd Quarter Quell announcement.” Nathaniel chuckled lowly, “Harry was and is always known to cause himself and everyone around him trouble so it was

natural for us to understand the stakes this Games would have on us."

"As a result, we were clever." Nathaniel explained. "Harry didn't know about this but we planned an escape plan for if things even did go sour, and everyone who died here were sacrificed to the cause. To the Rebellion, to the Districts. To Panem's future."

Nathaniel began to walk and the camera followed him, Tom, Ron, and Hermione keeping out of sight. "The peacekeepers ordered for all the citizens of District 12 to stay in their positions and not to move when the force-field in the arena was broken," Nathaniel showcased to where the riots broke out. "As a result, and with our foreboding sense disaster was on the way, the infants, children, teenagers, and young adults escaped out of the District as parents, mothers, fathers, grandparents rioted against the peacekeepers to give their loved ones enough time to get out."

He gritted his teeth when skeletons laid before him. "They died with the peacekeepers who were fighting against them. I suppose not every death the President can calculate for?" He said offhandedly. "If not our own, his own for the sake of control, order, and peace."

"What type of President do we have? An enemy."

"For months, for years, for decades — District 12 has been a rebelling District. With the lowest population, with the lowest survival rates from the Hunger Games, and the lesser odds — it all changed when my apparent step-brother was born. We're not, to clear things up. We were only taken under Sirius Black and under his protection. Orphans, belonging to no one." Nathaniel stared up to the dark sky. It made the mood of the retelling darker. More ominous. More true. "Harry was nothing but kind. He helped the District connect to one another, and that is not a crime. He was a bright soul, not meant for the world behind bars that these District fences were. Are. Like his song, he's a free bird meant for the sky."

"We, as a District united over our association to him because he was everywhere, not backing down from the social norms that were kept to yourself - don't associate with anyone that can't bring you food, or water, or shelter, or safety. From the Merchants to the Seams, Harry associated with everyone. Taught the kids survival skills, taught the adults' trust, and certainly was there for us when we most needed it. And we were there for him when he was reaped."

"That's why, I'm saying this — District 12 is gone, heart, body, and

soul because of the Games. But we're not gone because the fire that's still in our hearts isn't dead. The citizens, who are the strongest amongst us," he quoted Dumbledore's speech from back in May about the victors, "are going to keep fighting for our birthright. District 12 because how dare you take that away from us. I'm Nathaniel Croseph. Soldier Croseph. And I'm one of them."

Once Avian said cut, Tom was clapping and Ron went over to pat him on the back.

"Good speech, mate." He wiped some tears away from his eyes. "Got me tearin' up."

Nathaniel laughed, grinning brightly, eyes tired. "Yeah, I just thought - what would hurt the most?"

"Definitely aimin' high there mate. You ready for yours, 'mione?"

Hermione nodded at them. "Yes."

Tom thought he saw Hermione appear a bit frightened by Nathaniel's speech.

Hermione stood in front of where the school was.

She tied her hair back into a ponytail and put the notes into her pocket. The school was rumbled and ash as she turned to face the camera. Her brows were furrowed and she pouted, trying to be strong. Tom found that she had a difficult time acting when he told her before the cameras were rolling, "hey Hermione. Try to relax a bit. You appear too tense."

"Isn't that how I'm supposed to act?" She asked him.

"I think the term is more mellow. Like a small flicker of a flame that is about to erupt, if you get the imagery. You've returned and your home is in shambles." Tom explains, because it was true. "We're talking about you before the Hunger Games, why you volunteered — why for the Rebellion and what returning here makes you feel. All these are completely valid and you're allowed to say whatever you feel. Just go with the flow. We can always redo clips or make more. There's no need to be nervous. There will be a whole editing process after this, I'm presuming."

“Yes,” Avian told him. “We’ll spend hours perfecting it.”

“Good to know. So… if you're ready, Hermione?”

“Yes, I am.” She exhaled, trying to act calmer. More angry.

When the cameras began to run, she began with her storyline and where her story fit amongst all of this information. After all, who wouldn’t want to know about where the first volunteer and first female victor of District 12 came from. Was born from. “This was my favourite place in the world.” Hermione began. “I loved knowledge and books, I still do, but now it’s gone. District 12 is gone. I didn’t even know it was gone until I was rescued from the arena and found out in District 13. Because yes,” she tells the camera. “It exists.”

Hermione began to walk from the school, the cameramen following her. “This was my walk home from school everyday. Now, it’s the walk to nothing. Walk of Chances; Walk of Fire; Walk of Ash and Flame. Sparks of the heart of fury. District 12 has always been a place of rage from its core. Nobody likes to be stuck underground working. It’s perhaps the scariest place to work for no reason at all.” She tells the camera. “The Capitol doesn’t use coal for anything extreme so of course, we’re the one that gets destroyed as an example. You might destroy us, but you forget to hide your cards - of course we burned. Coal is in our blood. Our belongings.” She explains.

“This is where we thrive and power through the hardest, when we’re on fire.”

“I knew a lot of these people growing up. As teachers, as sellers, as people. These were friends’ parents, these were the generational call of the children whose parents led the first rebellion and lost. This was their legacy. This is District 12’s fate once and for all, but we will see the day where those deaths in the First Rebellion are met with succession. Understanding. Victory. Just because you can put out a fire doesn’t mean you can’t light it again with all the ingredients.”

“I was nothing before the Hunger Games.”

“But I was and still am Harry Potter’s friend, and that in itself is an achievement greater than anything. I didn’t have any friends before Harry. I was a loner. A bookworm who read Capitol propaganda in the library at school, rewriting our history of what happened before the Dark-Days. Before everything. About how we were always made to do this; coal mine. I didn’t want that to be my fate,” she explained, “it’s why I volunteered for the Hunger Games.”

“I’m selfish. I think everyone is at one point or another in their lives. I wanted freedom. I was naive to think I would get everything in the world by becoming a victor. Because if I know anything now, it’s because we have to fight—fight in more than the Games. The Games are scary because it’s what reflects real life and war, but children, aged twelve to eighteen do it every year. Why are you scared?” She rhetorically asks. “Because you’re now of age. Because this is not your fate. Well, why was it theirs?”

“I know I don’t have a right to say this — I volunteered, how would you be able to understand?” Hermione shrugs her shoulders, “perhaps because even the tributes who volunteered from academies in higher Districts were victims at the end of the day. Why punish and blame children, who were killed, only because they were dreaming for higher and better things for themselves. Those are dreams. Eradicating them and chalking them down to misguided is the truth, but not all of it. They wanted freedom. They wanted glory; promises the Capitol fed to us; they wanted to live and prove to their Districts they’re more than the stories. But in the end, they ended up dead or with the fate of a victor. No glory, only more horrors.”

“This might be where I’m going to draw the line between where I stand and where the victors do, because at the end of the day, I’m the luckiest girl in the world. I didn’t have a tributes’ fate. I didn’t have a victors’ fate. I’m alive, untouched, and for the most part, untraumatised. The Games are hard to live with, digest. The lonesome life of a victor is harder. Harry’s fate, might be the hardest.” Hermione gulps, narrowing her eyes to the ground.

She didn’t extend upon her words any further.

“I want to wish for more things than being a coal miner. I want to pursue my dreams. I cannot do that in the way Panem is now.” Hermione tears up when she sees her house. “This is it. This is my home. These were where the dreams were built. This is where the fire was lit.” She turned to the camera. “Fight for your home, your dreams. Don’t let them turn to ash - fight and dream together.”

“This is Hermione Granger, last Victor of the Hunger Games, signing off.”

The camera turned off. Tom clapped for her.

Perfect.

———

The next location they were at was the forest.

Ron stood before the camera, staring out to the woods, the wind blowing his hair as they positioned themselves further back into the District, showcasing where the fence broke that night. Tom crossed his arms, remembering the fence clearly. Hermione was hugged by Nathaniel, the two accepting the comfort they offered each other. There was a minute of silence before Ron began to speak. The other cameraman positioned himself away from the view of the other camera, but close enough where he was only getting a side view of Ron's face. "I'm Ron Weasley. I'm the sixth kid to Molly and Arthur Weasley. I'm Harry Potter's friend."

The other camera was back in focus of Ron. "This is the forest outside of District 12 with the meadow. On the night of the 75th Annual Hunger Games breakout, this is where we escaped to. It's the place we knew the best, the forest. Ever since I was a little child, I've slid underneath the fence and ventured off into the forest with my other brothers. The forest is our home. Where the Capitol doesn't even touch us. It's why we headed there when the fire-bombs began to go off."

"We're the brave," Ron says. "We flew our small little wings and got far."

"Let me show you what this forest means to us."

Ron walked down the meadow and into the forest. The cameraman followed, Avian loving the footage she was getting from the looks on her face. If anything, their voices were going to be what sold the entire performance. What their words meant, what meanings were struck from the imagery of a District they've never seen well before in shambles like this. Once inside the forest, Ron stood on a log. "We'd come in here and chop wood." He reached underneath a branch and easily enough, an axe was in his hand. "We left weapons all over the forest and hid them in plain sight. If the peacekeepers came in here, we'd all be toast but not even they could be bothered enough to do this to themselves. They aren't that clever you see. Outsmart 'em and you get 'em."

"My brothers helped our family stay alive during the winters with the collection of game and wood, venturing out into the forest risking the most dangerous of things. Their lives. But they did it, every year, food was on the table. Not everyone was so lucky. Then, Harry came and helped. Then, Hermione. Then, Nathaniel. His sisters. All of us—

District 12, banded together as a community to help each other during the winters. I think only three people died last year which was pretty good for us. They all choose to." Ron lifted himself into the tree. "Harry is one unpredictable little fickle thing. Was friendly with everyone."

"I'll admit it, I wasn't friends with Hermione or Nathaniel or anyone 'til I met him. I was quite only social with my brothers and my younger sister. Then, Harry brought me out of my shell when we were kids and I grew to learn to love and appreciate 12 for all the sufferin' and hardships we had to go through because it was all the same. No one was different from another. So we learned this and built a community through all the struggles. Y'know, sometimes I try and imagine us another way, but no. This was 12. This is what it's like to live in a District where freedom isn't a option, it's a luxury. I used to wonder what I'd be like to live in a treehouse far from the Games. Far from all the problems and obligations. Then, I think - what it would be like without my family?"

"Because that's the sacrifice I'm makin' by doing that." Ron sighed.

"I don't think I'll miss 12 because we're not gone. 12 was a hell hole. Restricted by rules, now — 12 is the forest. Free to do whatever we like. But we're choosing to fight, in spite of this. We're fighting for what our people mean to us. The past, the present, and the future. Our children, our ancestors — they mean somethin', y'know. I might be some random country kid, some District kid, but that doesn't mean I'm not important. I'm gonna fight. I'm gonna fight for what it means to have home taken from you. I wouldn't wish that upon anyone, so know… you're not alone. We're doin' this together. Say the word."

"Ron Weasley, you'll know me — and you'll remember, I was born from nothing."

"Be like me, free; 'cause I sure ain't gonna be like anyone else."

The camera was cut.

"That was great!" Hermione smiled at him.

Ron got down from the tree. "Hope so. Never been that all convincing before. It's Tom's turn."

A lot of eyes were upon him, Tom nodding at them. "Yes, yes it is."

———

Tom sat with his legs dangling in the lake, on the pier Harry picked him up and threw themselves both into the lake. He glanced and remembered the memory, content, and destroyed. He wants more memories, he wants Harry. Now he doesn't have him, but this is going to try and convince Grindelwald to get him back. Anything Tom says won't affect Harry more than it will help him. He takes some deep breaths before he's on camera. He gulps.

"I fell in-love with Harry Potter before the Games. Before I knew what love was."

Tom glances away from the camera at the lake. "Harry was born here and by his birthright it's his. District 12. The freedom of the District." He played with the engagement rings on the chain, not focusing his attention onto them. Only looking down at his legs that were in the water. "People like to predict where I came from, but I grew up in an orphanage. So did Harry. If you can imagine, we're both Capitol-kids. That is until we both divided into two completely different paths from where we first met. Best friends, in the bowels of the Capitol."

"I'm selfish. When I saw my first friend again, being reaped five years later, I was distraught. Being the President's successor meant that everything in the world was at my fingertips, but for the first time ever. This was not supposed to be something I did. I wasn't supposed to associate with tributes, only victors. Only the winners. Not the meaningless — and especially not someone from 12. But, I did because I'm a Capitol-kid. Selfish and wanting. But is it so bad to love something so much you want to fight for it?"

"I snuck onto the truck with the help of my stylist, Francisca, and we reunited. Harry had no say in the decision and I didn't even know if he was going to remember me. I was afraid, perhaps for the first time in my life, of making a decision that wasn't scripted for me. But then, he remembered me — and we grew closer. A week, that's all we had together. More than a lot of tributes though."

"Dumbledore, your President, berated me to always follow and manipulate the rules — manipulate people, be selfish so that when it was my time to become the President, I would be everything he would want me to be. Someone unnoticing of the traumas the Games caused the Districts. If I had everything, why would I possibly want to trade it for something else like changing the system? But no, Harry never said anything to me about this — but I hated it. Hated the thought of him going into that arena, having to fight people who technically I was about to be the reason why it was all happening. So… without Harry

knowing, I betrayed the Capitol."

"It was perhaps the best decision I've ever made in my life."

"I was free from the shackles of those expectations the presidency was going to force upon me, and I was going to be able to love freely — who I wanted — without fear. I cheated. I know, Harry didn't. I sponsored him, not Remus Lupin. I abused my position of power to make it unfair. Tilt the odds in his favour. I was always going to do that." He glanced away from the lake, to the nature around them. "When I see things I want, I get it. That's how it's always been to me, but this time — I had conscious thoughts behind what I was doing. So it was scarier. Nothing in comparison to what the tributes in the arena had to go through, or the deaths of the people every day in the Districts because they're starving. I just felt afraid. And I think that's what needed to happen to make me like this. A being, conscious of their responsibilities in this world."

Tom leaned back on the pier, looking up to the sky. "I protected him after the Games. I spent time at the hospital, and I began rebel plotting without his knowledge. I didn't tell him anything, and after the Games. I think it's the first time we shared our I-love-yous. Being teenagers, mind you, we have big hopes for the world. But growing up to become the president, I knew I had to be realistic. But what is so idealistic to think loving him and wanting us to be happy together, was so hard to come by? Perhaps happy is too much of a word. I think it's understanding the situation together and fighting for what our morals deemed acceptable afterwards that's what it means. Even if dying together was the answer."

"Harry made people happy. He made me feel happy and belonged for once in my entire life," tears swelled in his eyes and he ignored the emotions that occurred deep inside his body, next to his heart which was clamping up, right by his soul. A part of him was missing and he was trying to keep it fresh and empty so he didn't forget the feeling of Harry forever. "I'm an orphan. He's an orphan. We're bound to be fucked up in this world. Even if the world divides us more, loving through the trickiest of situations doesn't mean anything when we're together."

"He's my only one." Tom admitted. "My everything."

"As a wise man said, it's the things we love that destroy us, and it's true. Harry's everything to me. My opposite, and everything good part of me." He ignores the tears of Harry's friends. "I don't want no other

person than him. And being here in District 12, with all these memories of us together — because like I said, I'm selfish and get what I want, is like a dream. I know it's true but distorted because he's not here with me. The feelings are the same, but it's not."

He breathes out. "This is my home because this is where Harry's from."

"After the Games, I snuck out to the District with my friends as a cover. I escaped in the early mornings to meet Harry in his house in Victor's Village, and we snuck off into the forest together. We came here," he gestured to the house behind him, "and sometimes I fantasise about us living here together. I hated the outback. I still do somewhat. It was cold that morning when Harry threw me into the lake, here."

"And even though it was cold and everything was awful, he was there with me. Smiling as the sun rose. And I don't think I'll ever see a beautiful sight like that again. Two beautiful things, so natural, a part of the essence that captures the world—rising and falling every day—the day and night of my world. The light which circles my solar system. It was glorious, and that's why this war is worth fighting for in my eyes. Not for anything money can be bought with, but for him and what he stands for. He is my reason, he is my everything. Not even he appreciated anything bought."

"Now, all I wanted to say was that me, the worst betrayal the President's ever had before, admits to you - he wants you to be scared. Not to love who you want because that unites you, and as Ron likes to say; Us. You might have my beloved but that doesn't mean I'm not going to stop fighting in this war. I turned the cogs to be with him. I'm not going to finish what I started just because he's not here with me. Because Harry's reason, not my owner. I'm not going to be told what to do anymore. I'm free — and I know how much of a coward I have been. Not anymore. This day is of new beginnings. Dreams. Hopes. Stories."

"For the life and death of the people of Panem, the Districts, 12 and beyond. For the future children of our becoming world, I'm not going to back down. I'm going to fight because my heart is soaring with words that cannot be spoken or translated. I'm every pretty song Harry's ever sang, I'm burning with the passion that is fixing us for love and what it means to have things loved destroyed. I'm everything bad in this world, but I hope to fight for everything good and worthy. No luxuries buy what the Districts have. Camaraderie. Trust. The

anger to fight. We are united through the Hunger Games. Don’t be afraid, everyone is going to follow along behind you. I know I will.”

“I’m Tom Riddle; the President’s betrayer. I am nobody’s successor.”

“I’m only me.”

Chapter End Notes

I really have nothing to say besides I've been busy lately. Last week I had school camp, this previous week I've been finishing off my assessments (and now I don't have any more for the rest of the term!) Everything is pretty chill now, so I'm going to return back to my normal posting schedule. Anyway, lots of love.

Up next, "You're On Your Own, Kid - I Can Do It With A Broken Heart."

NOTE: This next lot of chapters have some trigger warnings so look out for them when they come!!

P S

You're On Your Own, Kid & I Can Do It With A Broken Heart

Chapter Notes

Posted: 15th of June, 2024

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The propaganda clip was sent out to the Districts—not to the Capitol the next morning.

The final product was glorious.

What Tom didn't expect was for a reply so soon after.

Sitting there, eating his dinner, he watched as the Capitol's theme song played on the television screen. Nathaniel tapped him, swinging his body around so he could see what was about to happen better. Tom's eyes went wide at the screen, gaping. Harry. Alive, relatively untouched and pale, he sat in a suit on the couch which was inside of the Mansion. Tom felt his blood run cold. He was terrified and small. All the colour on his skin was a sickly wood colour as if it was dying. Tom gulped, narrowing his eyes at the screen. Barty was beside him. Narcissa - from where she was eating her dinner - stood up. "You traitor! I'll fucking strangle Barty when I see him next."

Tom softly smiled at her comment, Andromeda sitting her ass back on, as Barty spoke to Harry on the screen. "It's lovely to see you again, Harry Potter. I think the last time we spoke we were on bad terms. I'm quite glad to see that's cleared up." Harry glanced off screen, nodding before glancing back towards the camera. Someone was being held at gunpoint. He was going to be forced to say things he didn't believe. "Now, there's been a lot of speculation about what happened that fateful day in the arena. Perhaps we should talk about it."

"Lets." Harry gritted his teeth, narrowing his eyes at him with the ability to kill.

"Actually before we start talking about the arena, I think we should talk about a controversial topic at the moment. People in the Capitol and in the Districts are speculating that you and Tom were in a relationship. Perhaps, you could give us some insight about that and what truly occurred there." Then, with a curt tone, Barty asked. "What

is your relationship with Tom?"

Again, he turned off-camera, shuttering. "Nothing—we're nothing."

Tom turned to Nathaniel. "Someone's at gunpoint."

"Yes, Tom." The teenager gulped. "I think I can see that with how Harry's telling us."

Iris looked up at him with big, sad eyes, voice full of hope. "Don't worry about Harry, Tom. He's just trying to protect himself and the person who's there. I wouldn't worry about what he says because if it's true and someone is at gunpoint, then he's not saying something truthful—is he?" Tom ruffled her hair, sighing.

"I suppose so. It doesn't mean it doesn't hurt any less."

Harry's eyes were blank, staring to the floor, fidgeting with his fingers — brace off without his engagement ring in sight. Tom fiddled with the two rings on the chain. He was protecting both his and Harry's love because he couldn't. "What is Tom proclaiming then? About you two being lovers and having an affair together pre-Games, knowing each other before the Games, and this trip to 12 he took after your Games?" Barty saw the propaganda then, but Harry didn't. His eyes widened significantly, realising everyone knew about the two of them because Tom told them. His eyes went to the camera, knowing he would be watching, before glancing back at the person at gunpoint. Gritting his teeth together, Tom could tell Harry was instantly scheming.

His words were manipulative and cunning, clever, and hurt Tom all the same. "It meant nothing." Harry began, pursing his hands together as if he was finally admitting the truth about the situation. Slowly, his words began to break Tom even though he knew it was false. "I was using him for my own personal gains." Glancing up to the camera, no remorse was in his eyes and Tom was proud of his fiancé for being so clever. It hurt which meant he was doing a good job. Harry spoke truthfully, oh how lies could be twisted in such a way. "My parents were traitors of the Capitol and as a result, the Capitol sent them to their deaths. I was an orphan. That's the truth. So was Tom."

Barty appeared perplexed by his willingness to tell him all of this but didn't stop him.

"We met as kids. I used that to my advantage when I was in the Games—to win. Betray my allies, betray the tributes: all to win and

come home to become the crowned victor. To taste victory I sought out." Harry was unmovable, unchallenged. Tom hated how he sounded so sophisticated. Like his word was Bible, the truth and righteousness of the world, laying bare. It ripped him open like a fruit, preferably a pomegranate.

Barty asked the real questions. Nathaniel, and everyone Tom looked at appeared sour. "How did you get to the Districts if you were a Capitol-citizen?—I mean, I won't berate you on your parents because you obviously can't control who they were and their deaths, but… you had a life. Did you trade it to become a District-citizen for any particular reason?" Harry faltered at that question. He was creating so many lies instantaneously, and Tom was kind of turned on by how sharp his tongue was and how fast his mind worked. His intelligence was over-brimming his emotional maturity cup, which made Tom unfortunately smitten for Harry.

He shouldn't be turned on like this, but intelligence was tasteful.

"I was manipulated at a young age by a man, my proclaimed godfather… Sirius Black." Nathaniel choked beside him, Tom patting his back. He snorted, finding that incredibly funny and smart. Besides, it's not as if Sirius is going to get hurt by it. He's in 13 where it's safe and if he knew who was at gunpoint, Tom thinks they'd all understand. Harry has a bleeding heart. He wouldn't ever be saying this otherwise. "Friends of my parents, to get me out of the Capitol and take me as far away as he could. I left, once I heard Tom was taken in by the President, the very man who executed my parents under treason. I didn't want to be caught up in their secrets. So I left with him and went to District 12 where I registered and lied about my citizenship. Fortunately, my godfather was a peacekeeper so we didn't get caught. Not until I became a tribute in the Games."

"Fuck," Tom mutters underneath his breath. "He's good."

"A little too good," Nathaniel grumbles.

"It means he's doing a good job."

And he wouldn't be tortured more for it. Let it hurt. Let it burn.

Hurt, hurt, hurt him—and Tom will be able to endure it: for them.

"Ah, understandable. The young are quite susceptible to the influence at such a young age." Barty touched the couch, trying to get closer to Harry. Memories of the night before the interview haunted him. He

gulped and pushed those memories away. Narcissa was right, he wanted to kill Barty too. He glared at the screen, getting ready to kill if he came any closer to his love. “So… the rumours are to be met with answers, Harry. What happened that night in the arena?”

Harry pursed his lips, as if thinking about it when realistically, he’s trying to come up with a plausible lie to tell him and all of Panem. Tom shook, wanting to know everything that he was thinking. At least he didn’t appear too tortured, enough to keep his personality, his sanity—Tom was glad for that. Harry was always the strongest one between the two of them. “I’m not sure. All I knew was one minute the arena was spinning, my fever slowly sentencing me to my death - the illness I contracted from District 3—“ Radian coughed at that, gaping at the screen whilst everyone at their table exchanged eyes, “which the Capitol fortunately healed for me, and the next an explosion sent both Gleam and I asleep. I’ve heard it was Hermione’s doing… due to the rebellion's influence, I’m sure.” Harry lowered his voice, almost pleading with the camera and not to Barty.

“I… I was not involved with the plans, nor was Gleam, or the Careers or, I don’t know. I couldn’t name who was involved, but I know I wasn’t happy - because I didn’t want anyone to die like Esteven proposed. The Games are to kill fairly.” Biggest load of bullshit Harry’s ever spoken and Tom clapped his hands at the funniness and sarcasm with the comment. Iris snorted.

“And there were only three tributes left besides our group. We were going to have to eventually begin to kill ourselves from within. I was afraid and so was Gleam and Hero. We didn’t have a clue what was going on - and I’m presuming Tom was doing his own manipulations onto me. As a result, I had no idea what was happening.” Tom shook his head, smirking — eyeing his love on the screen. He was outdoing himself this time. He should win an award.

Nathaniel rolled his eyes. “Harry should be a comedian.”

Tom shrugs his shoulders, saying. “He hasn’t seen the video. Obviously, he’d realise it if he had.”

“He’s doing a fairly good job,” Abelene commented. “I think he will be okay after this.”

“So long as he doesn’t look back to the person at gunpoint.” Tom murmurs.

“Ah, well I’m glad we cleared this up.” Barty said, gesturing his hand

to Harry then at the camera. “We don’t like falsely accused notions for no reason.”

Harry even laughed at that. “Yes, I’m grateful.”

“But… I do feel like I have to ask… what are your opinions about this rebellion? It’s certainly for no reason, is it not?” Barty brought up, slyly. Harry was happy to give his opinions about this — considering he had already lied through most of the discussion already.

Tom watched as Harry nervously glanced off to the side again before inhaling with a small sad smile. What he said next almost gave Tom a boner. Tom hoped Harry knew how convincing he was being. “I’ve been manipulated and abused by many parental-like figures. If anything, Tom has been too. He was always smart, but not with his heart. It was precious. To even me, I’ll admit.” Tom held his hands to his face, covering himself so he could bite his lip at his words. Fuck this was hot. How could one make words this achingly delicious, Tom wants to devour him and his stupidly attractive mouth. “The rebellion is only going to cause more deaths. Unnecessary deaths, like my parents. Why make more child orphans? We certainly didn’t like that in the Capitol—why would the Districts wouldn’t be any different?”

Tom banged the metal a couple of times, still keeping his face covered.

“Are you alright?” Nathaniel asks, bemused.

“He’s so good…”

Barty smiled at Harry, holding his hand out for all to see. In return, Harry grinned back at him like a serpent about to strangle its prey—fuck, Tom wants him to strangle him, he thinks. Barty was going to die just for receiving that and not him. “Thank you for coming on the show Harry, I know this must’ve been hard for you, with how Tom is acting ridiculous in the Districts. I think he’s drunk on power.”

Tom pointed a finger at Barty, glaring. Harry is the only one allowed to say ridiculous comments like that, dickface—

“No problem, as a victor - truth in the arena is for all to see.”

Immediately, the finger went down and Tom was shaking his head at Harry, before cowering back in his hands. Nathaniel patted his back, telling him it was okay, snickering at him. Harry got up from the chair and seamlessly waved at the camera, as if this was all a joke to him.

Then, he left. Tom did feel like he was drunk, but not on power. Fuck, probably submission of all things with all those pretty little lubricative words that slid out of his mouth. He gulped, feeling all eyes on him.

Slowly, Tom looked up, composing himself. “Are you alright?” Hermione asked.

Tom whispered to Nathaniel. “I think I like Harry better when he’s the bad guy… is that so awful?”

Nathaniel snorted, patting Tom’s back as he hid back in his hands. He turned to Hermione, “I think Tom’s got the case of the down-bad for Harry. If anything, it’s not a big worry. Regardless,” glancing down at his schedule, “we need to head off for training so let’s finish up our lunch and head to the gym.” They spent the next half hour eating before heading back to their rooms to change. Afterwards, they headed down to the Fission Training doing a harder workout than usual. Then, halfway through their training session a new point popped up on the schedule:

4.30 Meeting F8.R5

His training friend, Tom noticed Nathaniel began to be, peering over at the schedule. “Commander Grindelwald,” he murmured. “I think he might want to talk to you about the interview and what you’re going to do afterwards. Personally, the best decision would be to relay back more information against the things Harry has said - but I don’t think he’s gotten off harshly. Like what’s happened is good for him, considering his circumstance or it’s all a lie and he is being tortured. But I’m giving him the benefit of the doubt and that he’s not that good of an actor.”

Tom shook his head. “If he was that good of an actor and we weren’t able to tell if he was tortured. I’m dead. With his hero complex, that’s a lethal combination.”

“Agreed.”

Before he left, finishing up the weight strengthening, Nathaniel told him. “Well… you’re certainly not nothing to Harry.” Tom met his eyes, raising an eyebrow at the comment. “Harry can hardly lie unless in a situation a) so all those feelings he had for you weren’t fake. I think he is a good actor, despite this, not as if he would pursue it for anything else though.”

Tom thanked Nathaniel, smiling, and left.

When he left the training room to head to the meeting, he noticed immediately when the two Fission siblings were following after him. Not saying anything about their presence, thinking it must have something to do with them, he entered the elevator with the two Fissions—Circe pulling the elevator door down as Lynx pressed the button to Floor 8. None of them said anything, walking out on Floor 8 to the fifth room. Tom glanced at all the different people there. Sirius, Amelia, Grindelwald, Francisca, Remus, Kingsley. It was a whole combination of random people he did not expect to be there. He stood as Circe and Lynx went to take a seat. “Soldier Riddle,” Grindelwald tilted his head at him. “I think you’ve done well to defuse what a situation that could’ve been.”

“Congratulations, we are a few steps closer to getting your beloved back.” Grindelwald told him.

It was hard not to smile, but Tom hated Grindelwald so he kept a neutral expression.

He opens his hands at the table, looking at him, as if gesturing they did have a problem on their hands despite this success. “Harry caused you to be manipulated by us, so we’re now thinking how we’re going to prove this wrong, and how to best utilise you. Personally, it’s a bit tricky trying to figure out where to put you since we don’t want you on the frontlines because that could mean we potentially lose you, but we can’t keep you inside our labyrinth forever. Have any ideas?”

Tom tilted his head, thinking. “You’re looking for propaganda, right?”

“Correct in your assumption.”

“I don’t necessarily have to do anything yet,” Tom explains. “For now, we’re only gaining footage of me shedding my skin from Capitol to District. If anything, the best way to do that would to put me onto combat — somewhere where no Capitol citizen would ever go unless they were serious about the cause they were behind and if you put me somewhere safe, or relatively safe were people could see me… perhaps we can make it out to be like, no I am doing something. Just watch.” Kingsley smirked at Tom’s direction.

“That is who I told you about, didn’t I, Commander?” Kingsley turned his head to him.

“Yes, yes—you did.”

Grindelwald places his hands together, on the table, thinking. His two

children watch him in earnest, Sirius cracking a smile at his direction. Remus appeared content and Francisca appeared prideful of Tom. His mood had lightened significantly, seeing how untouched Harry was in his interview. If he was able to withstand that and appear strong, it meant they hadn't done anything to him yet. Grindelwald glanced back at Tom. "Combat, you say. I think I know the place for you to go. District 10 is two hours from District 13 by aircraft. It would be the best place to gain footage at since they are fighting hard and rough over there. It's a fully fledged war there. It should be the place to go." Grindelwald turns to his two children who observe their father and study Tom with the utmost care. "How has Soldier Riddle's training been?"

"Interesting," Lynx comments starved. "Good enough for battle."

"His battle IQ is high."

Grindelwald rolled his eyes at his two children, ignoring them. "Tom, later today—you will head down to level thirteen underground further; Iris Blues or Soldier Graves could take you, and you shall meet with Mrs. Graves who is working on weaponry. You'll train and practise with your weapon and tomorrow, you should go into combat with a few people of your choosing. You'll have until tomorrow morning to pick them. But I'll only allow three to come with you. Although," they meet eye-to-eye, "I'm supposing you'll pick Soldier Croseph, Soldier Granger, and Soldier R.Weasley."

"You are correct in your presumption." Tom nods his head.

"Good. I'm sure they're up to standard." Grindelwald commends without question.

"All three soldiers will attend you with your visit tonight. Tell Mrs. Graves my best wishes."

"Alright." Tom agrees. "Am I excused?"

Grindelwald turns to Francisca. "With the help of your prep team, all members apart of recon will receive specific battle uniforms designed from the members of the Capitol. To assist with the image of importance and who we are in general. My two children, Soldier L.Fission and Soldier C.Fission will attend with this recon with the camera crew. Your departure will be around noon tomorrow. You are dismissed." Tom accepted that, inclining his head forward and leaving the meeting room.

Iris and Radian came with him down to level thirteen.

Nathaniel, Hermione, and Ron follow them. Iris held Tom's hand, talking to him about what they did in the day prior with school and Tom was glad she was learning more knowledge about things she liked to learn about. The rest were discussing amongst themselves what they were doing with the trio, heading downstairs as they weren't told about what they were doing yet. Once downstairs on the floor, Iris led him to where their mother was working. Esteven glanced up from her station, smiling at her two children who were walking towards her. "Hello, Iris Blue. Radian Rust. Oh, Tom! I heard, congratulations."

She stood up and noticed the rest of the incomers. "Just the people I was waiting for."

Hermione rose an eyebrow at her. "Us?"

Esteven narrowed her eyes on her. "Yes. Did Tom not tell you?"

"No," Nathaniel grumbled. "We tried to ask but nothing came out of him."

The woman sighed. "You guys are going on the battlefield tomorrow so you need weapons."

"We're what?" Ron shouted, flabbergasted. "Tom! Why didn't you tell us?"

Tom scratched the back of his neck, debating whether or not he should tell them the real answer. He couldn't be bothered to tell them. Either way, he kept quiet. It was better than speaking. Esteven rolled her eyes before gesturing back at the weapons she had for them. "Guns," she presented. "These are the weapons I've created and you'll be able to take them with you to District 10 tomorrow. But, I wanted you to practise with them first so you at least knew how to fire them if you did come into any trouble."

Picking up the first that was in front of him, Tom headed over to the firearms range. Looking at the small disk which zoomed in the target for him. He pressed his hand on the trigger and BOOM! Tom looked back from the gun and at the burning target in the distance. Nathaniel threw his hands up. "I swear, you cannot do anything wrong. It's unfair."

“Really,” Ron frowned, glaring at him without intent.

Esteven shrugged her shoulders. “It’s not a surprise, have you fired firearms before?”

Tom said once or twice when he was a young teenager who wanted to shoot guns. Ron said, “as if that wasn’t concerning,” but Tom only dismissed his comment. Hermione appeared bothered by his ability to succeed so seamlessly but she was a perfectionist so he could understand. She was jealous. It was fair enough. They all were.

The fifty-year old woman branded the gun as Tom’s, loading lots of bullets to go alongside his gun as Hermione, Nathaniel, Ron, and Radian practised with the guns — Radian with the reluctant permission of his mother, but she was watching so long as he wasn’t reckless with the weapon, they were going to be fine. Nathaniel was the worst with the gun, they found. Ron was the best. Hermione was mediocre. Esteven noticing how much difficulty he was having, she began to look through her draws of weapons to try and find that one that fitted him better. Taking the gun away from Nathaniel before he blew up the bunker, Esteven passed Nathaniel a bow and arrows. “A bow?” Nathaniel tilted his head at them.

“Have you ever shot one before?” Esteven asked.

“Yes, I taught Harry how to make them.”

“This should work for you better. I’m noticing how much difficulty you’re having with your fingers.” She points at the bow and arrows. “Since all of your strength isn't in your fingers, you’re having a difficult time shooting because it’s not what is made for you. Something more strengthening like a bow and arrow will help you manage all the correct distributions for your body.” Nathaniel pulls back the bow without putting any arrows in. Esteven comments, pointing at his form. “It’s quite good. If you taught Harry, it’s quite amazing Harry’s so well-versed with the bow and arrow.”

Nathaniel tilted his head, not understanding why she would say that.

“Harry’s got a shoulder injury but in general, his body isn’t made to shoot arrows for such a long duration. Sure, he can train himself to do it like he has - with his less dominant arm, no less - but if it’s not the weapon that suits him, he won’t be able to pull off his full potential. Do you understand?”

“I think so.”

She points at the different colours. “Red is explosives. Yellow is fire. Grey are the normal ones.”

“So no red ones inside?”

“No, let’s not do that.”

Nathaniel grabs out a grey one and pulls back the bow after sliding the arrow into place. Then, he launches it into the distance and hits the bullseye. Iris cheered and clapped for Nathaniel, Tom impressed. Esteven acted as if she knew this was going to happen. Radian continued to practise with the guns but seeing as they were still too heavy for him to hold properly, he was pissed. As Nathaniel, Hermione, and Ron registered what weapons they wanted as theirs, he headed over to Radian. Tilting the top of his gun upwards more, the teenager fired.

The flame hit the target and Radian appeared surprised at his success.

“You should try more weight training in class. It’s that your muscles aren’t fully developed yet — is the reason why these are so heavy, but don’t try and over do it. It’s only going to destroy your muscles if you do.” Radian accepted his advice and Tom returned to Esteven who was logging the weapons into the database. Nathaniel, Hermione, and Ron were beginning to head back over to the elevator. “Are you coming, Tom?” Nathaniel asked him.

“I’ll meet you upstairs in our room.”

“Okay, we’ll see you later.”

Iris and Radian left somewhere in the room next over. Tom thought it was their mother’s living quarters and was surprised not to see Neuro or Gamma anywhere, but it was around dinner time so perhaps they returned to eat. Esteven observed him, her eyes slippery gazing up and down his body at Tom’s body language. He began. “Have you seen Hero lately?”

Esteven appeared surprised at the point of the topic. “No, why?”

“He’s quite literally distraught. I think you should see him.”

“He’s not having a mental breakdown is he?”

“Worse. He’s hardly able to function.”

The woman's eyes thinned, souring. "I'll see what I can do but our interaction wasn't exactly pretty." Tom thanked her and said that, whilst she was there, she should see Cho as well - that she was slowly recovering from Cedric's death and the Games. When she asked if there was anything else she needed to know, Tom told her about Abelene and how she was slowly about to connect with Hero but he was destroying himself. That he needed someone who he knew to visit him. Esteven accepted, saying it was under her debt to Tom for saying her life and her children's.

Tom returned back to his private living quarters.

Nathaniel, Hermione, Ron, Ginny, Luna, Fred, George, Neville, and Scarlet were all on the floor of his bedroom — playing cards in their pyjamas as he rose an eyebrow at them. Grabbing out his pyjamas, Nathaniel got up from where he was playing and dragged Tom to the bathroom, shouting, "you are not undressing in front of all of us!"

On the ground, with his pyjamas on top of him, he heard Fred and George groan. "What?"

"Tom was going to give us a show?"

"Nathaniel!" Tom could hear Ginny frown in her voice.

"How dreamy."

Nathaniel shut the door and locked it from the outside. To be fair, Abelene, Sibyl, Neuro, Eris, and Gamma were all there too but as his original argument states: Abelene has a crush on someone much older than her already so it didn't matter whether she was attracted to Tom either — since Nathaniel had already accepted that crush: Sibyl was more likely into women than him - and would only congratulate on his nice body than liking him: and the rest he didn't care about. He changed, returning to find only Narcissa, Bella, Lucius, and Mathis on the other bed.

He blinked, almost dizzy by the whiplash.

This was a cross-over of so many universes right now.

Tom was dragged from conversation to conversation. He was talking with Nathaniel, and the Twins, and Neuro, and Narcissa, Bella, Lucius, back to Hermione and Ron—again. It was a lot. And actually, he went to bed first in the other room because it was so crowded on his own. Dimming the lights, sleeping with a blanket on top of him, he heard

when the door opened. “You alright?” Abelene asked him.

“Just tired…” he yawned back, trying to sleep.

“Alright, I’ll see you in the morning then.”

She shut the door behind her and Tom was trying to figure out what the fuck they were going. Until morning? They were they all planning on sleeping together in that cramped room, but yes, that was exactly what they were doing — he found out. Deciding he wouldn’t trade that for the world, he went back to sleep comfortably on his own until Francisca joined him in the room, sleeping on the other bed and planting a kiss on his forehead. “Goodnight.”

He grumbled one back.

She chuckled softly before making herself into the bed.

———

The next morning, the stylists were in Croseph’s bedroom, hanging up all the soldier uniforms and getting them ready. Francisca cut Tom’s hair so it was less long and it’s usual amount, sharp, and meant for his face. Whilst Rhodes painted his fingernails black and kept everything about his face the same. After Francisca had finished up with Tom, she joined Morgan and Kallisto with Ron’s hair—the teenager having his hair cut from his shoulders to the nape of his neck, where there was still enough hair to put it up into a ponytail. Tom watched the process as he changed into the soldier’s uniform.

Francisca braided a small strip into Ron’s hair before putting it all into a high ponytail. Tapping his shoulders when she was done, she grinned at him. “You look like a real warrior. Now, you should change into your uniform.”

“Thanks,” he smiled back at her.

Nathaniel had Morgan, Kallisto, and Francisca after they were done with Ron. Although, the women appeared to be having a more difficult time with him than anyone else. Bonavich, Rhodes, and Soter were on Hermione — cutting her dead ends and putting her hair up into a bun. Making sure she looked perfect from the front with her hair unable to fall out, with bobby-pins, and getting her nails done. No makeup was put on any of them.

The eldest Croseph was having a difficult time keeping still in the

stylist chair, Ron and Tom watching him in bemusement. Nathaniel had his hair cut short and like how Francisca usually did, she paced about her subject trying to see if she could do anything more for them. Nathaniel was struggling to keep still. Once that nightmare was done, Nathaniel didn't even care about getting naked in front of them, wanting to move. Tom laughed before turning his attention back to Hermione. She looked great.

Hermione changed in the bathrooms, and when she returned, they were ready to go. Hugging Francisca quickly before they departed, Tom thanked the stylists for their efforts, heading out of the room. Their answers were quick, and Ron, Nathaniel, and Hermione had to try and thank them too — Tom upstaging them. Nathaniel nudged him. "You really had to do that, didn't you?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," he said smugly, pulling down the elevator.

"Yes you did." Nathaniel grumbled.

"I hope you realise you got in changed in front of us yes, and poor Hermione." Hermione squawked at being brought up. "But you didn't hear me say 'don't change in the room,' did you?" Ron groaned at their bickering, eyeing them both through his eyebrows. Tom touched Ron's hair, "I actually think this suits you more."

"You two bicker as if your siblings, and I would know." Ron states plainly. "And thank you."

Tom said it wasn't an issue and once they entered the floor where they were meant to be on, they stepped out and began to walk past all the nuclear weapons — eyeing them as they passed. The group headed over to where the aircraft would be. Before they got on, they were handing the weapons Esteven created for them, and sat down. Lynx and Circe joined them, in their own specially crafted get-ups, with the camera crew who was with them a few days prior. Avian nodded her head at him, whilst they took seats opposite to them.

The door shut behind them and they flew two hours across to District 10 where war had broken out. He watched from the sky the state of the District as they landed. It was destructive — nearly destroyed. When they stepped out from the aircraft, Tom squinted at the bright light before walking forward to a group of strangers from District 10 heading towards them. "We didn't think you were coming," the man began. "I'm District 10's Commander, Rasp. It's lovely to meet you."

Tom had his hands shook, nodding at the man, before Commander Rasp directed his attention to a building in the distance—"we have a lot of wounded, come follow me."

The propaganda team followed after Commander Rasp and Tom, the two heading to where the makeshift hospital was. Lynx and Circe followed behind, making sure nothing was going to arm them. The camera crew followed amongst the group. Entering the back of the hospital, Tom didn't realise how bad it smelt and disgusting the place was to look at. Nothing had been cleaned, there were dead bodies lined up on the walls, blood, faeces—everywhere. Commander Rasp turned his head to Tom as they walked through. "We haven't been able to find a place to lay the dead yet. But for now, we're trying to do our best with who we have alive."

Tom understood perfectly why Grindelwald chose this place to be and it was because it was the safest place to be where the people could see his face, but standing in front of all the sick and wounded, he didn't know if he could do this. He might appear brave and demeaning and someone not to mess with, but because of what happened to him during his childhood — Tom didn't think he had enough compassion to give them what these people wanted. Hope. He stood there, turning back to Nathaniel who stood there. "I don't think I can give these people hope, Nathaniel."

The teenager leant his head forward. "Just let them see you. They can interpret it how they want."

Tom gulped, knitting his eyebrows and walking towards the injured masses slowly. He glanced around at the children who were bleeding, the other people trying to help the sick and injured, the occasional scream and shout with pain, he felt his hand begin to shake, making his fist into a ball. He didn't want to appear weak.

It was quick when silence fell over the hospital, feeling plenty of eyes laying themselves on him. He glanced around at the injured more when he heard someone ask, "why are you here?" Tom made eye contact with the boy, trying to register the question before answering. Yes, why was he here?—in this place he would've never stepped foot into two years ago.

He answers what he feels is right. "I'm here, to see you."

Another boy asked, "are you fighting with us, Tom?"

Tom said that yes, he was.

What he didn't expect to receive were a three-finger salute high in the air, with the four-toned whistle playing accompanied to the salute. It was his first time ever experiencing this; and Tom thought he made it, where he finally felt accepted as the Districts like one of them. He gulped, standing tall and trying to be strong for them. Tom wished Harry was there to see this. Selfishly, he thought Harry might be even proud of him. Then, he saw a little girl head over to him.

She appeared young, around ten years-old, with her jet-black hair and brown skin. The girl's brown eyes locked eyes with Tom's own. Tom listened to what she had to say. "I'm Imelda's sister." The little girl began and Tom was shocked, "Carmen Garcia. I watched the Hunger Games last year and I know who Harry Potter is."

Carmen had an older boy stand beside her who was around fourteen years-old. With the same facial shape and the same eyes, he knew this was Imelda's younger brother as well. This was Imelda's family. She stood taller than Tom did, and he was almost double her age. "Imelda's selfish. Very. I know that 'cause that's who she is. And I like that Hermione girl," her accent was thick and heavy but Tom was able to understand her clearly—pointing to Hermione behind Tom. "What she said was similar to how my sister was. She was ambitious and wanted more. So, she betrayed Harry."

"But he didn't betray her back; he supported her. That interview he did was bull-shit," the ten year-old glared, "and you can agree with me. He was always with us from the beginning, before he was born. He was with us through his parents. Harry has been fighting more than all of us have combined to keep who he is—a rebel at bay in the Capitol." Another little boy who stood behind Carmen's older brother ran over to Tom's legs and hugged him. "Julián! Sorry about him."

"No, it's okay." Tom said, kneeling down to the eight year-old boy who hugged him.

"Thank you for helping us," the little child said. "Thank you."

It was devastating to think why Julián might've thought all the war depended on him, because it didn't, nor did it depend on Harry. They were only smaller pawns in this big game the commanders were moving. But, he was going to soothe the kid's worries. "I'm here not because I have to be. I am here because I want to be, for you guys." He spoke for the masses. "I'm not going to live in some palace tucked away somewhere just because I can. This is where I want to fight and I'm willing to get killed for it." It was Tom's greatest fear, dying, but

he thinks if it means freedom will be the cost of his death for all — then, perhaps it did have some merit. Even if it didn't give freedom the day after or the next ten years, if his death has meaning, then it's worth it.

The little kid wrapped his arms around Tom's neck again and he reciprocated the hug as Carmen's older brother stepped forward and slowly picked the child and placed him onto his shoulders. Julián sat there, bothered that he was no longer hugging Tom, but Carmen's older brother held his hand out to Tom. "I'm Diego Garcia, pleasure."

Tom shook his hand, confident. "Tom Riddle."

Carmen went up to them, pouting. "I was speaking."

Diego turned his head to his little sister before relaying back to Tom. "Imelda, Mateo, Andrés, and Elena might be dead but we're still alive and fighting. We're glad that your with us. Come on, best we get going." Diego doesn't stop Carmen and Julián from waving their goodbyes to Tom. He stands in the middle of the room, lighter than he had been, before turning back to where the camera crew were standing. Once he was out of the large building, he wiped his eyes, Nathaniel holding a hand to his shoulder comfortingly. "Why am I here?—Harry would've rather have been here and seen them."

"Pucker up, Soldier Riddle." Lynx told him. "We're heading back to the aircraft."

Then, a repeating sound occurred. It was the bomber alert.

Commander Rasp shouted, "there's a bunker this way!"

Following the commander, Tom and Nathaniel close together — they headed through the different buildings the commander was leading them too and Tom noticed the hovercrafts that flew through District 10 immediately. Tom watched through the glass of the windows as they shot at people trying to fire back at them. Glancing down at his gun, he realised with all the firepower that was inside of it, he could try and destroy them. Nathaniel glared at Tom when he rushed off and into a different building, ignoring the shouts he got from the others. Nathaniel shouted at him. "What are you doing, Tom?"

"Fighting for them!"

Heading up the stairs of the building, he backed off when the hovercraft came over and shot the gunners who were shooting up at

the hovercraft before taking his gun out and glancing at them. Tom noticed the direction they were going in. Bombs being dropped off in the distance, “they’re heading after the hospital… why?”

Nathaniel shrugged his shoulders with his bow and arrow, getting ready to shoot them. “I don’t know, Tom, perhaps all association with Tom Riddle is banned and now Dumbledore is getting some kind of fucked up revenge.”

“Bitch,” Tom said with his gun pointed at the sky when the hovercrafts turned back around.

“On three.”

“One…”

“Two…”

“Three…”

At the same time, they shot off into the distance and blew up the hovercrafts as they passed before they were able to shoot down at the two of them. Tom felt a rush of adrenaline hit him as he turned his head, watching as they crashed with each other — but the hospital. It exploded. His eyes went wide, hurrying down the staircases and heading back to where they came from. Hurrying, the two soldiers rushed to where the others were, standing before the burning building — collapsed within itself. Tom was distraught, remembering the small hug of a boy who barely lived, and a girl with a personality of the sun, and a teenager with fire still in his eyes.

Nathaniel turned his head away from the flames as they ran towards them.

Lynx and Circe were about to tell Tom off and restrain him for not following orders, but Tom hurried past and asked if there was anything they could do to help them, but no one moved. Hermione and Ron were looking away from the fire. Tom, standing there, with tears multiplying on his face at the ash and rumble those people with dreams were turned into. Avian asked Tom, “Tom—what do you want to tell the people what happened here?”

That camera crew did not care about him, or Nathaniel, or Hermione, or Ron. They didn’t care like the Fission siblings didn’t care. He felt his blood boil with the feeling of being mistreated. At being used like this. They died and they died for content in the camera crew’s eyes;

the Fissions' eyes. He gritted his teeth, ignoring the tears that swept his face. "I'm alive." He said, furious. "You haven't killed me yet. We're in District 10, and the Capitol has bombed a makeshift hospital — of only innocents. Do you think they're going to treat you fairly? The strong and the weak are going to die, no matter how much you plead. The Capitol will never treat us fairly."

"This is why we need to fight back. For the dead and the living."

"President Dumbledore, Albus Dumbledore, you fickle—paranoid man who drinks poison antidotes because you are so worried that your entire system is going to come crumbling down the instant you die, you can do whatever you want. Torture Harry, manipulate him if you must. But this—" he points behind him to the flames and dead, "meeting Harry made me see this."

"The horrors of the Capitol and for who they are, monsters. Fools to think it would ever last this long; that their protection of strength, order, and control—whatever to keep the Districts at bay who last. No." He shook his head, sniffling, angry. Raw and fresh with more fury. Recycled fury from the ones that came before him. "I'm still here, fighting for them!"

"I'm fighting for the dead; because they don't have anyone to fight for them!"

Harry, his parents, Tom's parents, the dead tributes, the dead victors, the citizens of Panem—this is who he was representing. Tom hoped Harry wasn't dead yet. There was still time to rescue him. If this worked, if he went home with the Districts united, he could get his boy back.

The camera stopped rolling, Avian clapping her hands together in excitement. Lynx and Circe went over to Tom and grabbed his shoulders forcefully, taking his gun away from him. Then, Circle put him in handcuffs and Lynx injected an anaesthetic into him. He passed out in Nathaniel's arms.

Chapter End Notes

> OMG OMG OMG OMG I FORGOT TO FUCKING SAY, SUZANNE COLLINS IS WRITING ANOTHER BOOK + MOVIE?? OF HAYMITCH'S GAMES, WHICH PROBABLY WON'T BE CENTRED ON HIM BUT OTHERS? I'M SO INTERESTED, anyway with the current political world it makes sense. But I'm going to eat the book and movie up anyway. 2025 and 2026 is going to be very

interesting years at the end of each year. Anyway, that's all I had to say.

Up next, "The Archer"

P S

The Archer

Chapter Summary

idk I forgot, it's been awhile

Chapter Notes

Posted: 8th of November, 2024

Holy shit- it's been nearly 7 months since I've last posted. I'm out of hiatus guys, I've just been going THROUGH IT. OK for a summary I've been dropped by my friend-group (not resolved but I'm ok with the outcome now), I've won my SOCCER FINALSSSS--whoop whoop, I've written another fic that's about 95k words (not anywhere near close to being done), studied for my exams which I've just FINISHED TODAY. FUCK YEAH and what else?? Let me think for a sec. OH YEAH, FUCK TRUMP. I AM A HATER, but after investigating into that shit-show I have a few things to say--and since I'm not American, these are my two cents. The men of this world/prominent in America are becoming more republican with the growing freedom of women's rights, even though they are actively trying to strip them away from women. American (non-republican) women stay safe,, yk what, women in general because- just because their actions will have consequences,, doesn't mean they can't change and grow JUST LIKE THE MEN CAN but actively choose not to. Everything is political, especially literature-and I want my stance to be clear. Although, again here is my 2 cents. I think, one day, America will have a female president. I just don't think Harris' campaign was strong enough this time around, and her direction of her campaign. Although, I think she did a fucking good job with the short time allotted to her. My dad and I have had some conversations about the decisions of the US election and,, I'm not sure if he's right--but I know Trump is similar to the dictators in said fan-fiction and real-life people... so I will never agree he should be president, but regardless I know LGBTQIA+, Women, POC women + men, etc... need to stay safe in these times and I wish for your safety. I get why a lot of people voted for third parties, especially the communities that are trying to protect Palestine and get change so no argument from me here/ I just wish there was a better way that everyone could be satisfied

(between the Liberal and Third Parties//I do think Republicans want (under Trumps' guidance) the worse more than not) but... look I'm 16. I can't do shit about any of these issues.

Just stay safe in these times and protect yourselves, your friends, and families. My issues aren't comparative to yours, and I'm thankful I am in a place where I am safe. Just, I want this to be a space where A) freedom is for all and B) this fanfic can be either enjoyable and read as a piece (I wrote a year ago, beginning about this time last year) on something to take away--whatever that is.

Anyhow, enjoy. Again, not American so this is the last time I'm going to speak of the election above because my dad thinks I shouldn't worry myself about things I can't control- but I can't help that I have empathy for things such as these. So, my 2 cents has been delivered, take it as you will. Goodnight. Stay safe 🩶

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tom stood behind Grindelwald as the propaganda was shown to District 13. Nathaniel was beside him, leaning against the wall, yawning. It was ten in the morning and the two got reprimanded for not following orders and due to the nightmares the day before, they didn't get a good sleep the night before. Tom felt like he was about to pass out, the anaesthesia still in his system from when Lynx and Circe decided it was the best response to tie him up and scare the fuck out of him when he woke him. Grindelwald said that he did betray Commander Rasp's orders but technically, they were unnecessary orders so they were following the next path to success—and they did. Nathaniel and Tom shot both of the hovercrafts out of the sky.

Still, that's not how they saw it so he was standing there, almost like a prisoner of sorts.

After the propaganda video was completed, Grindelwald went up to the microphone where the citizens of District 13 where clapping for the success of the mission. "Soldier, Tom Riddle, has done a mighty fine job collecting and gathering propaganda through missions to various Districts—and this one in particular will go out to the Districts tonight!" Cheers in the bunker rung out.

"Due to Mrs. Graves, Mr. Arcadius, and Miss. Gratian's work with hacking into the system of Panem's wavelengths of distributed data — we're able to send this to everyone but the Capitol. Success is in the midst of us, citizens." Grindelwald pulled out a card. "As a result of

the behaviour and success, we've decided to grant the rewards of such things."

Tom's head turned to Grindelwald, not expecting to hear that. "At the earliest, most safe option where both conditions are distressing enough to take action, the rescue of victors; Harry Potter, Gleam Vestis and Ceres Houska—will take place." He felt himself go dizzy, Nathaniel holding his him up. "As a result, as long as Soldier Riddle is able to fulfil his duties and his mission: these things seen fit will be met at the quickest opportunity. Good day, citizens, let's get back to work." Claps overwhelmed the bunker, Grindelwald stepping down from the podium and turning to Tom. He ordered them, "Soldier Croseph, take Soldier Riddle back to his dormitory, and stay there with him. Both of you have been excused of your daily schedule." Turning his back to him, he said. "You both look as if you're about to drop dead."

"Thanks," Tom glared at his back once he was far enough not to hear him.

Nathaniel grabbed his shoulder and helped him back to their living quarters, the teenager beaming beside him. "That's good news, Tom!"

He couldn't help himself, smiling back at Nathaniel. It felt like progress since the beginning of the depths of the underworld. Nathaniel helped Tom back to their room when he gave him a nod of agreement back to him. It wasn't long before Tom passed out with Nathaniel beside him. The body warmth reminding him of Harry's.

Kilo was hunched over his computer exhausted. Inside of District 3's communications building, he—his two best friends—and his two older coworkers were trying to shut down the Capitol's power by hacking into the system so it made it harder for the Capitol to harm the other Districts. So far it was a success, half of their aircrafts had been down for hours, but not all. Lua, Kilo's oldest friend and five years older than him, laughed at the screen. "Another's down. How many more left?"

"Another three hundred and forty-two." Xander, his other best friend, grumbled, sleep-deprived.

It was all getting to them.

Trapping themselves inside the building whilst District 3's strongest

held down the fort against the peacekeepers who had gotten word from the Capitol about where the hackers were coming from, they were to cut all power from as many of the aircrafts in-exchange for their extended lives. Kilo drank more water, typing the same codes into the screen. They had been there for a week.

From the sounds from outside, it appeared at the peacekeepers were getting closer to the door. Kilo sighed, wiping the sleep from his eyes. He glanced over at Mercury and Agora. Getting up from his chair, he leaned over the two workers. They weren't close by any means but they taught Kilo the works from when he was first offered the job after he was over eighteen and no longer had to think about the Reaping. He was twenty-two, and going to die in the name of the Second Rebellion. Mercury was fifty-two. Agora, sixty-seven. He pointed at the screen. "Do you see that?"

"It appears to be a glitch," Mercury relays. "I wouldn't say it's anything important."

"Maybe, but even our own systems - we've set up would have issues, wouldn't they?"

"We would've of made them the work, Kilo," Agora rolls his eyes at him. "Yes, maybe it is."

Agora clicks on the glitch and they appeared with an entire line of code. Kilo's eyes went wide, knowing this from when he was taught. The youngest of the team; Esteven, Borgin, and Burkes out of the picture now that Borgin and Burkes are dead and Esteven is in District 13… maybe, she could use this. "That's the Capitol's power source," Mercury gapes, confused. "Do you think Esteven is working with us at District 13?"

Lua speaks up from where she's hacking, "she knows the program so that would be an affirmative. I also think she taught her kids how to do it if anything bad was to happen to her, so maybe Iris or Radian. too. But from the looks of it, if we've able to take down the coding and rewrite it — only the best of workers would be able to fix this issue if we fuck it up entirely."

"New quest, people!" Agora shouts, "finally. I was gettin' sick of those aircraft bugs."

"Let's get take the Capitol's system down," Kilo agrees — heading back over to his seat.

It took hours before they made a dint in the system and the gunshots got louder. Kilo kept working and Xander was getting more paranoid. They all had guns with them in the room to kill themselves with before the peacekeepers got to them—incase the peacekeepers didn't want to kill them. Instead torture them and use them to fix their errors. They were some of the smartest people in Panem. They weren't about to let themselves be used one last time like that.

Xander was twenty-six and Lua was thirty. Xander had a younger sister to look after, with his mother, and Lua had two children of her own: Song and Ziya. Kilo had no one. It's why he made the internal decision to fight, if the peacekeepers were to enter the room, first. There was no one they could torture but him. If Xander, Lua, Mercury, and Agora somehow escaped — all the better. It meant they could continue to live.

His parents died young when Kilo was seven. His mother murdered the murder of her brother and was excuted, whilst his father died due to another sickness contracted in District 3 that same year. Kilo suspects the Capitol creates diseases and kills the people who cause the most trouble to them to keep District 3 in bay, conditioning them that if they worked and were good, no harm would come after them. Over the past two years, more diseases and illness have latched themselves onto everyone. Nobody in the communications building did not not know someone who had died. Everyone lost at least someone.

Kilo grabbed his gun once the gunshots got so loud, he couldn't ignore them anymore. Kissing Lua, his best friend, before kissing Xander and waving to Mercury and Agora—he ignore the sounds of sniffling and cries coming from Xander. He was the most emotional of them. Sometimes he reminds him of that Betrayer, Tom Riddle, who everyone was talking about recently because of the propaganda he's done to motivate the Districts.

"Fighting for the dead," Kilo softly sighs - opening the door, embracing himself for what he'd see.

It was a nightmare, gun-up and shooting, he ignored all the people he knew dead at his feet. There was only fifteen people left standing and there was still a large number of peacekeepers outnumbering them. Dad, Mum. I hope you're proud of me.

Kilo and Calc, a teenager a year older than him, who used to bully him at school for getting all the praise instead of him—who choose to

become a doctor instead, but where now fighting together on the same field, accepted each other's presence. Calc punched him and Kilo kicked his stomach back. Words, harsh ones, were thrown around because of the hatred the Capitol forced onto them. Made them.

This is who they were at their cores; fighters, fighting against the society who was trying to decide their fates for them. No, Kilo beamed, laughing hysterically. This was his choice. And Calc's. Xander's. Lua's. Mercury's. Agora's. Fighting like this was how they were going against their fates. No more Hunger Games, no more fear.

Fighting for the dead and the living.

Everything went dark.

Twenty-seven, working fifteen hours a day, hands with cuts all over, an axe in hand—Sol was glancing around at her District 7 workers. A plan was made. Laid, during the depths of the night. Bombs were planted all over District 7's grounds, waiting for this moment. Surprisingly, for the high-risk low-reward occasion, she was relatively calm. Perhaps she couldn't care anymore whether she died or not, or whether this war was won or not; maybe she wanted peace. However, a deep root of revenge twisted inside of her, pestering her for vengeance against her fallen loved-ones. Her mother, sisters, younger brother. Her father was the only one left alive, but he was at his death bed due to an accident.

She rose her head to the sky, walking into the forest with her mate, Olive.

She was thirty-one and clever with cards. The two, back in the old days, would head to the bar after work, drink their nights, play cards and sing shitty songs. Narrowing her eyebrows at Olive, she flushed, somewhat upset. The last time they did that, the two shared a kiss to a Morel Axel song - which might've been the worse song choice she's ever kiss to in her entire life, but Sol thought it summed up their relationship quite finely. Olive was exhausted beside Sol, and she wished they were both dead.

Buried underground, holding hands together, born in another life where they didn't have to chop wood for fuck sakes. Sol hates the outdoors. If she could trade living inside forever, she would. With the amount of times, she had to climb trees, chop wood every day, pushing her muscles further than she thought was possible with the

amount they ached, being inside — doing nothing, was luxury. Sol wished Olive and her did more than kiss.

Although, Olive would've probably had a hard time digesting their relationship like she knew she would have. Due to some motherly issues where their mother would throw axes at them kids, Sol especially, due to her anger issues—Sol doesn't think she would be able to accept the love given to her. Her father was very ignorant and neglective of the issues inside of the household so her younger sister died at fifteen when she was seventeen, and in the past five months—Susanna and Spruce died by the neglect of both their parents not helping. Sol ready to die. Then, her mother died which was more of a blessing than a burden, and his father got injured. It was only her left. Olive's father wasn't accepting of female relationships, internal homophobia ingrained within her, so they would've both struggled.

Still, that doesn't mean they can't hope for a future where it doesn't end in tragedy for them.

Sol whispers. "I love you, Olive."

Her girl's eyes wielded with tears. "You have the worst timing."

"Wanted to say it before it was too late, pine."

Olive rolled her eyes at her before wiping away the tears, Sol ignoring her own, as the two of them walked to their own deaths. It wasn't long before they headed to the final stretch of their journey. They were near the front of the pack so hopefully they would survive. Then, Heath nonchalantly sung the four-toned whistle and the group were off.

Sol and Olive climbed up the same tree as the peacekeepers shot at them, screams and grunts alerting them that their members were dropping from the trees like flies. Then, Sol felt her stomach shred open from behind her. She screamed, Olive on a tree branch grabbing her sides as she pulled her up. Tears clouded her vision as Olive shouted for her name. A hand touched her face, Sol nuzzling into the warm touch—thinking this might be the last thing she ever sees.

Then, she hears it. "For the dead and our living!"

Sol thinks it's a modified version of the fury Tom Riddle spurted out on their screens, the peacekeepers weren't able to get rid off, but it fit nicely, she thought. She felt her heartbeat in her heart and the bombs from underneath them went off. Screams and shouts of excitement

rung out from the trees, Olive crying and clenching her shirt. She was the only one not happy. Sol, on her lap, she thinks, moves her arm slowly to Olive's gorgeously dark face. She wipes the tears that are there. "Olive…" she begins, her love looking up at her sadly, "kill my father and live for yourself. Don't worry about me or anyone else besides you. I'm so proud."

Olive cries, holding her, kissing her cheek. "I love you too, Sol. I wish I told you that earlier."

"Like I said…" she felt her heart clench with pain, knowing she was about to die. "I'm so proud."

Sol closed her eyes, the warmth never leaving her.

The pain overlapped her body and she didn't want to know how bad it was. She thinks her spine was completely blown through and her stomach was shot out from the exit wound as a result of the good shot. It was warm, Olive, and Sol doesn't think she would trade this for anything else in the world. Perhaps, the good would be better than what she lived, but without all this pain and suffering, she wouldn't of been able to connect with Olive like she had. She wouldn't of been able to socialise with Susanna or Spruce like she had, nor would've met the greatest person in her life.

She thinks between the two of them, she was always the weaker one, so she knows Olive will be able to live without her. Time will tell if she makes it past the war, and if not, she'd tell her about it if there is an afterlife where they can gossip about all the things they might've if they met when they were teenagers.

She's glad she's dying in the arms of her love, as selfish as that may be.

His real name is Braiden Prada from District 8.

Here, in the sky, it's Pontus Berenice.

Watching as the Capitol pilots flew over across District 4, he teamed up with Commander Nammu from the District and alerted her of his plan. Sneaking into the Capitol a year prior with five of his good mates, via the peacekeeper program they have, they were all sent to different squadrons, parts of the militia where they fought against the Districts. However, like Tom Riddle, they were traitors to the Capitol,

bringing the military down from the insides.

Braiden was one of the bombers. Readying himself to shoot down at the District as District 4 fought back against the peacekeepers, he began to glance around to where the peacekeepers were at. Aiming for the peacekeepers - he shot at them, blowing them up. Isolde, his Capitol girlfriend - and head pilot of the MX1, asked what he was doing and to aim properly. Braiden smacked the gun, saying it wasn't working and he couldn't turn it - the machine malfunctioning.

What they didn't know was that there were bombs inside of the plan, about to explode.

In fifteen minutes, he would be dead and so would everyone else onboard.

Isolde told Gallica to take over as she hurried over to him. Bracing for the pain, she smacked his cheek and punched his gut. Grabbing his shirt, "what are you doing, Pontus?" Isolde wasn't the nicest woman, nor was she anything good. From one of the wealthiest families in the Capitol and all of Panem, she had everything he didn't growing up. As a result, she expected everything in return. The reason why Braiden succeeded so fast into the ranks as he did was that he exchanged his body for her to recommend him. Her names dug into his skin, Braiden crying. "Why are you crying - those people are nothing to you."

From a young age, Braiden knew pain. Born into the poorest part of the District, where his father was a deadbeat and never stuck around to look after him when his mother died during childbirth, Braiden was on the streets trying to live. He met his best friend, Loam, when he was six and attending school out of obligation - and he took him in to where he lived. It was an abandoned building with three other children who were there. His now other family members, Tucker, Cotton, and Baize. As the two oldest of the group, they put their names into the Hunger Games as many times as they could — to receive tesserae once they were old enough, but even sometimes that wasn't enough to survive from so they resorted to their last option. Selling their bodies.

Usually, since he was the prettiest, he would get chosen out of the group of other kids that were waiting outside the peacekeeper building in the cold, and be thrown out again, back onto the streets afterwards with aplenty bruises. Bleeding from many places, Loam would have to carry him back to their home, and wash him in the dirty river next door. He cried, for a long time, the first time it

happened but afterwards he got used to it.

He would lean his head against Loam's chest as the teenager washed him. There was never any romantic love between them but they were family, and this was how they got by.

When they decided the military would be a better place to go than working in the dire conditions the Districts was, all five of them signed up. Except, the rebellion was happening around them, and they all wanted to do what they could to help. Loam was dead. He died earlier that month from a bombing incident and Braiden decided he had enough of the world.

Isolde picked him out the first day she saw him as her new target.

Young, handsome, and vulnerable - sweetly nineteen, she took him in for sex and so long as he stayed and endured, she would gift him with all the opportunities of the world. And it was hard, but nothing harder than he had to go through when he was thirteen. She would suck him for all he was worth and leave him dry, with nothing good in his heart remaining. Loam knew what was happening and kept washing him whenever they met up, Braiden accepting the love and affection even if platonic. It was nice.

So this was it.

The death of Braiden Prada from District 8 in the name of Pontus Berenice for revenge.

Isolde slapped him again, she screamed, "you're so useless!"

"If I had known that from the start, I would've never picked you. I would've never given you - what you would've never deserved." She took him by his chin, Braiden knowing this was all going to be over in five minutes. Five minutes, that was all. Endure, endure, endure. "Although, I suppose you were nothing more than a handsome boy with nothing going on up there," she told him - teasingly. Mockingly, Braiden hated it. Hated how everyone tried wanted nothing to do with him than for sex - sex in which they controlled. "How cute, perhaps I should teach you a lesson or two about what disobeying your master brings you."

Two minutes, he reminds himself. Watch her face as she realises what goes on.

She begins to kiss him and undress him. Braiden doesn't do anything

to stop it. Always weak. Even with two minutes left to live, he can't find it in himself to stand up to her. Isolde was always going to win. He could hear Loam. Stand up for yourself, Braid. You can't keep letting her do this to you. But he never listened because he was useless. No, you're not—he would say—you're so much more than what life makes you out to be. You're funny and kind, don't let it overshadow that.

Loam was always the smarter one, the braver one, the stronger one between the two of them. Loam was like the big brother Braiden never had. He would comfort him of all his worries, he would take care of them. The two of them protected and helped each other.

Stand up for yourself this once.

I can't.

Do it, Braiden. Nobody's stopping you. Not even her.

Gritting his teeth together, thirty seconds left, he stood up. "I'm not your slave, Isolde."

She slapped his face, Braiden shivering. "You're nothing more than that—"
"No, I'm not. Because in the end, I won."

Then, the aircraft exploded.

On the boat which Varuna was defending against the peacekeepers shooting at them, with the aircrafts trying to blow them up from above, they shot back at them. The treacherous weather made it hard to make out where they were going to come from, but Commander Nammu whispered to her, "it's time to break out of here."

"Yes, ma'am!" Heading over to the helm, she began to spin the wheel in accordance to the direction they were heading in - out of District 4. Varuna watched as her older brother shot against the peacekeepers, the Commander glancing up to the sky. She was standing on the higher deck with her, looking out to everything else. "Is something the matter, ma'am?"

"A brave young man has done us a good deed today," she says. "I will make sure his story is known for all to hear one day. He's saved us all."

Above them, a loud noise erupts and Varuna gasps as an aircraft exploded from the sky and nosedived into the water. It headed in-between the water between the peacekeepers and them, the fourteen ships, escaping away from District 4. Nearly a quarter of the citizens of District 4 were onboard and she sailed them away, leading the ships. The fighters cheered in success, Varuna only watching as Commander Nammu's expression dimmed with sadness. She wiped a tear from her eye, before telling Varuna. "You're my successor, girl. If I die, I want everyone to know of the boy named Braiden Prada, yes?"

"Braiden Prada," Varuna nodded her head, trying to still the boat from rocking, "yes."

"He's a brave young man, was only twenty when he passed."

"Got it," Varuna was only fifteen but she could understand the significance of someone dying so young like this Braiden Prada. She would commit the name to memory as she sailed off into the ocean with her family. Commander Nammu told her, "he was a boy with a very hard life. His friend, Loam Camiren, told me how he was sexually assault in-the name of survival for food. Unlike 4, 8 wasn't so lucky. And that's how they got by."

Commander Nammu sighed, narrowing her eyes to the decking. "Let it be a lesson to know, that even the good ones—the best people in the world, might never get their happy ending."

"Did you know him, Commander?" She had to ask, horrified.

"I hardly knew him but he felt like communicating with me so we could sync up our plans."

Varuna didn't ask anymore, continuing to steer the boat until they no longer could see any land. Following the compass, she redirected their path so they were heading south, diverging east so they were heading towards District 5 and 10. Their plan was to make it to 12, 13 but they didn't know if they were going to be able to with the Capitol making it their mission to kill them. But if they hid well enough, perhaps they would be able to hide from them.

After two hours of standing on the decking, steering the ship, and freezing her bones off - she switched with Marsh. Known as the best helmsman of her generation, it was known that they'd be leading the ships to safety. Varuna sat next to her brother, Osiris, watching the waves dip to their seat by the amount of rocking the waves were causing them due to the storm. She leaned her head onto his shoulder.

“Can I tell you a story, O?”

“What, V?”

“Commander Nammu told me about who did the explosion with the aircraft.” Osiris asked who and she began to tell him about the story of Braiden Prada. Her brother’s eyes narrow, lips thinning as the explanation overcame him. She watched as her brother teared up. Then, he told her. “I’d never ever let you go through something like that. I’d kill everyone before that.”

Varuna softly smiles, grim. “I know - that’s just what happened to him growing up is all.”

“I’ll tell the crew. Let them all know his name and tell everyone on the other boats.”

“Thank you, O.”

Her brother wrapped his arms around her, Varuna relaxing her body into his chest, wrapping her arms together around his back. They stayed like that until Aunt Kipper fetched them and they were fed fresh salmon. The two ate the raw fish, hanging out with Freyr and Indra before heading off to find their mother. Underneath the ship, she was creating blankets with all the materials they could get for her on the land. Varuna went into her spot on the ground and tilted her head against her side, Osiris sitting on the ground opposite to them. She smiled at the two of them. “How was the escape?” She asked.

“Successful,” Varuna told her. “Fresh fish is on the deck if you want any.”

“I’ll go up in a little bit. Is your father and two older brother’s still alive?”
“On B3,” she tilted her head, thinking. “Should be—no confirmation yet.”

Their mother hummed before kissing her forehead and kissing Osiris’. Varuna, yawning, she said she was going to head off for an early bed and that she was going to take over the night shift once twelve o’clock rolled around. Having to sleep together in the same, small bed, Osiris joined her instead of his girlfriend’s bed. Varuna leant against his chest as he wrapped his protective arms around her, “why aren’t you joining Max?”

Osiris shrugs his shoulders. “Perhaps I feel like it’s too cramped to

sleep like that."

Varuna can read her older brother like a book. "You don't want nightmares about Braiden."

"Aunt Cove had to go through something similar, V. I don't want to think about you, or I, or Roe, or Triton going through the same thing." She agreed with him but thought it was slightly unrealistic. Roe was twenty-four. Triton was nearly thirty. Osiris might be nineteen, her fifteen but it didn't mean they were going to need sexual abuse in-exchange for coins, although - it was nightmare fuel. That she could understand. Aunt Cove did go through similar abuse back when District 4 had harder living conditions; Osiris was closer to her. Perhaps, he could empathise better than her.

They slept, hoping they weren't bombed during the night.

"I can understand," she said before she fell asleep, "I love you too."

He kissed her forehead like their mother did to them.

Devon lost everyone.

His kids, his wife - everyone he loved was dead.

This was the Capitol's doing. Born in District 10 to his mother, raised by his grandmother, getting a job as a butcher, having a wife who had three beautiful kids; Cassie, Maddox, and Jenny. They died in the hospital Kerry was dying at. Tom Riddle was there and the President took it as a sign to kill all of them in attempts to kill him. Devon was out trying to shoot down the aircrafts but failed, watching as they clashed together, smashing down buildings in the distance. Devon was forty-seven, his oldest was seventeen—middle, fifteen, youngest, thirteen. They didn't make it out of the Hunger Games age group and that scarred him, knowing how much it frightened him as a kid to be picked.
This was much worse, he decided. They died, not in the Games, but in war. That was significantly worse, he thought. Devon didn't want to live for much longer without them.

He knew nobody in the group of survivors who had bunched together to see what more damage they could cause. They had guns, they had all kinds of weapons but the ones they were discussing where the bombs they had retrieved and rebooted. This was going to be it. Once

everyone fell asleep, Devon had the plan finalised in his head. Grabbing the bombs and strapping them to himself, he took the trigger and held it in his hand. Layering more clothes on top of himself so nobody would be able to see the bombs underneath, he left the safe house.

Disappearing, he was going to head to the one place peacekeepers were starting to move back into. Their barracks. They were going to try and flood them out if less than a week. Or try and imprison them so they get back to work. Devon wasn't going to allow that to happen.

He climbed over the wall into the barracks, which took a bit of time since he struggled to do so, and landed on his feet once he was inside. Knowing from the girl, Parma's words that all of the bombs were connected to each other, he began to slip the bombs calculatingly throughout the barracks. Lots in the sleep quarters, only some outside of them, Devon sat in-between where all the peacekeepers were sleeping happily, blissful to the world around them.

With the trigger, he thought about all the things he would've wanted to before his death.

His wife, Kerry. His children, Cassie, Maddox, Jenny. His mother, father, grandparents. All dead.

He began to cry, sitting there and thinking about them.

Then, he decided it was time.

Pressing onto the trigger and embracing death, the entire building exploded into flames — screaming erupting from the barracks. He sat there, watching as some of the further away peacekeepers got up, but the rest were exploded in. He was still alive and unwilling to be tortured. After the peacekeepers had left and it was only him and the dead remaining inside of the barracks, he left. Walking, and going through the front door, he was in no hurry to get back to the safe house he originally came from. If the peacekeepers wouldn't kill him, than they would.

Instead, he decided to go to what remnants of the forest and sneak through - heading into District 5. Perhaps they would have something happening within their borders that he could help with. District 10 was on the verge of collaspe with a little less than three thousand people there left.

Trudging through and finding a blown out exit on the other side,

District 5 was a mess. So many spots, within the District, were exploded in — craters on the ground, Devon able to see, where he walked through. He avoided the craters and began to walk where his legs would carry him to. He had nothing left to live for other than revenge. It didn't take long until Devon found one of the many rebel groups within the District. A boy, couldn't of been around twenty years old, Pulse, explained to him the situation. That District 3, somehow but Devon wasn't going to question it, was able to tell and pinpoint where for the Districts to hit the Capitol so they would be able to take down their system. Their hydroelectric dam was the cause for almost all of the Capitol's energy - it wasn't hard to solve their thought process.

"So you're going to destroy the dam?" Devon said, almost angry this kid was going to do that. His kids were nearly his age. "That's a suicide mission."

"Well," Pulse shrugged — awkwardly eyeing him, "it's for the cause. For the dead and our living."

"I'll do it. You stay. There needs to be leaders within the District."

Some of the other District 5 members appeared surprised at his statement. "I'm nearly fifty," he explains, "all my kids are dead to the war so is my wife and parents. I have no one left in District 10 and I stole all the bombs they had to blow up the peacekeeper barracks which they were starting to gather there. I blew them up and came here. I do not want to live, but you're young," he says, "the rest of you should know that if you want other people who don't do the suicide mission to survive if you leave someone behind to take care of them."

Devon turns back to Pulse. "You're going to stay alive because it's the hardest job of them all."

"You're young, you're a leader—and nonetheless you haven't lived. I have, I'm sure some of us have. So you're going to do your forsaken job and look after others after our passing because that's what your job says for you to do." Devon stands up straight, "and after this war — if you live to do whatever you want to do. Marry, have kids, get a job. Doesn't matter to me but do whatever you'd like. Alright, I'm heading over to the dam."

"The mission isn't for another week!" Pulse yells at him. "You can stay here with us until then."

Devon turned back to Pulse, annoyed. "Really? Not for another week."

Pulse shrugs his shoulders, “we need more people.”

Turning his shoulders back to the footpath, he begins to walk away. “What are you doing?”

“Gonna go find more people to join, thought that was obvious,” Devon puffed.

Pulse chased after him and he ignored the kid for the most part.

Heading into various buildings he came across, he began to tell the mission with the dam to the most common of people. Devon told them realistically it was a suicide mission but if anyone wanted to do one last ‘fuck you’ to the Capitol, it was the time to do so. Again, didn’t have to do it if anyone didn’t want to but to spread the word around. Pulse was like a clingy kid without much direction, Devon found. A kid with dark circles around his eyes, who grew up too fast like his own. He found he didn’t say anything about his appearance and let him follow him around.

He kept going until dawn, telling people the mission — and there were a lot of takers. No children, Devon would accept, but only adults above the age of twenty-five which Pulse didn’t pass. Even after dawn, he kept asking people. His mind was set, he would die with the dam.

———

Harrow coddled a baby in her left arm and coddled another in her right. Hiding in the forest, outside of District 11 with the children of parents who were fighting this was to protect them.

Her six older brothers were all hunting for food as her and her two younger sisters, stayed and helped with the children the parents dumped with them before leaving to help with the rebellion. She was the oldest between Raven and Fraser so she taught them how to handle babies. Her brothers created a wooden house for them, and the thirty-three other kids who they had retrieved amongst their midst stayed within it unless they were old enough, fourteen to help with the hunting. She was thirteen, it was the system they put in place so not everyone went to help, and they would help Harrow, Raven, and Fraser look after the little ones.

Her best friend, Gala, leant next to her with another baby on her stomach. She was trying to get sleep as she look care of the child. Harrow put one of the babies on her chest as she stroked Gala’s hair. She had such pretty hair.

There were six infants. Ten toddlers. Thirteen kids under the age of ten. Four kids under the age of fourteen. Harrow, Gala, Mace, and Taro — were all under the last category. Her younger siblings were in the under ten category. So it meant most of them had to do motherly work. Putting the litte kids in the care of her siblings as she fell asleep, she let the baby Gala held sleep between them. Mace joined their group, Harrow wrapping her arms around his chest. The twelve year-old whispered to her, blushing, “what are you doing?”

“Keeping you warm, and I want to hug someone.”

“Why don’t you hug Gala?”

“She has a baby in her arms. I’d rather not hurt it and hear it cry.”

Mace hums, before she falls asleep.

When she woke up, she felt someone tapping on her. Groaning, she immediately knew who it belonged to. “Leave me alone, Baley.” It was her third oldest brother. The older two didn’t care who she was with but Baley did because he was overprotective of her. Her brother didn’t say anything but picked her up and pucked her away from Mace. “I was cold, we weren’t doing anything.” Baley eyed her as if he didn’t trust her word. “You know, I think I hate you when you do this—“ she said, slapping him. “Don’t think you’re the boss of me.”

“I’m your older brother, Harrow, you shouldn’t be—“ “As if you weren’t sleeping with girls when you were my age.” She retorted back, crossing her arms. “Besides, I don’t want to have sex with anyone. How many times have I told you guys, I don’t want kids! I don’t want sex. I don’t like the idea of sex. I’m not in love with anyone and I never will be.” Baley’s eyes widened at her, but she was annoyed of all his crap.

Darlington and Envy, her two oldest brothers sat together, almost bemused at the situation. Harrow held a hand up to Baley. “Put me the fuck down,” and he did. “Now, you’re going to let me cuddle or hug, or be physically connected to anyone I like.” Mace woke up at the commotion, groaning when he saw Baley. “You’re obsessed with me not making the same mistakes as you did, because you don’t want a little fling to get me pregnant like one of your last girlfriends did. Well, let me tell you, Baley. I don’t care enough for it but you’re acting like a legitimate child. Shut the fuck up and leave me the tell alone.”

She glared at Darlington and Envy. “You let him do this—you

assholes."

"Hey, we both placed our bets on you," Darlington snickered. "We weren't fools like those ones."

Chia, Taurus, and Winter shrugged their shoulders, all reacting different. Taurus told her, "I thought you were going to be more lenient with him, but no," he agreed with her older brothers, "she only had gotten stronger." He was not even a year older than him, but the ego. She glared at him, cracking her knuckles. "Okay! Okay," Taurus began, "we got the message."

"I will beat you all up."

Envy and Darlington looked after three of the infants as Harrow fought Taurus, Chia, and Winter. Those idiots deserved it, she recognised and was willing to punish them. Gala laughed at them when she woke up and Mace was mildly scared. Once she was done, cracking her shoulders, heading back over to Mace and Gala, she told Baley. "If you ever do something like that again, you're ending up worse than them." She directs the comment at Baley's younger brothers. She sat down by her friends, Gala passing her the infant she was taking care of.

"Revenge," Darlington told Baley. "Don't poke the bear—you've done it more than enough."

"Ma was the same," Envy explained. "Harrow has her fire."

She didn't know whether to take it as a compliment but she found that she couldn't careless. Taking care of the baby, the group decided it was best to add more insulation to the wooden building before the winter came and for them to add a chimney. Harrow came with them to collect buckets of mud and take it back to the building where she stuck it across the sticks that were together, the wind hardening the blobs.

Harrow didn't know how long she was going to have to suffer in the cold for, but so long it was with her family, and they were protected from the large amount of peacekeepers trying to keep District 11 in-control, then they were going to be fine. Her brothers collected wood and kept it inside, out of the rain so when they needed to burn them to create a fire, they could and it wouldn't be wet. Like this, they might survive this war alive.

She had hope.

Chapter End Notes

Stay safe 💙🏳️‍🌈🏳️‍⚧️ **P S** Everyone

Bejeweled & Cassandra & Cornelia Street

Chapter Notes

Posted: 19th of December, 2024
TRIGGER WARNING UP/&/COMING
I pray for you guys. It only gets worse from here.

Life update:
I went on vacation which is where I kind-of lost my will to post. Went back to school, lost my friends in that term but my soccer team won our grand final so we are in A-League next year! My birthday began to study for exams, post the plot + flunked my math exam (I got a D 😞) and did work experience. I got to travel overseas!! Yipee. I returned home yesterday at 4am because my dad forgot to pick me up from school so I stayed there with a teacher who was pissed off at me for an extra 40 minutes,, yayyyyy. Um. I began writing this fanfic on the 2nd of December, 2023, so happy anniversary? For me? Not you guys yet. I finished writing it @ the end of January so, uh I clocked in for the summer. But I haven't locked in posting so sorry. 😞 But it is a completed work so eventually the posting will come to its conclusion. Sorry for the nearly 7 month hiatus. I reallllllly was distracted. I also wrote another 100k + 100k + another 50k (somewhere) for 3 other fics so I was a bit busy doing ao3 work so well, not that I have uploaded it yet. My new rule is I don't post without finishing it because I don't ever finish it otherwise so I'm trying my best.

Bye bye with the info dump. Now I have to edit this for it to be readable.

Merryyyyyyy Christmas, or whatever you celebrate and Happy New Years!!!! 2025 here we come :)
Y11 & Y12 next year LOL what the fuck

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After the fiasco in District 10, Nathaniel got permission from Grindelwald for them to hunt outside. Nathaniel, Abelene, and Sibyl—like the Weasleys were all allowed to head out, and Tom was dragged along with them, apparently ‘allowed within the agreement’ because

they were in the same living quarters written down as family. Tom doesn't know how much of that is true, but he headed to the surface with the rest of Harry's friends. Told to come back from two o'clock, they had a good chunk of the day outside.

Ron and Ginny stayed behind with him as the group lingered forward, moving through the forest to do various things. Not feeling like hunting, Ron told Tom that he could always swim in the river they have or sleep or tan. That he didn't have to go hunting, but they brought him along so he wouldn't feel left out. Hermione handed him a book, the girl 'apart' of the Weasley's family—Tom read the blurb. "Alright," he accepted. "I'll go read somewhere."

"I'll come with," Hermione says. "Hunting isn't my forte either."

"Yeah, sure." Ron said, "go try and be near the river or something so we can hear where you are."

Accepting the deal, the two headed off to the river where they passed and began out their stuff as Tom took off his shoes and socks, rolling up his pants so he could dip his legs in the water. Hermione brought out another book from her satchel and the two read together. "Psst," she says, Tom glancing over to see a small bottle she brought with her.

It was brandy.

Tom's eyes went wide, "where did you get that from?"

She shrugged her shoulders, smiling, "my parents snuck it in from when they escaped."

He non-verbally asked if he had permission to drink some and she nodded her head back at him. The two shared the drink as they read, Tom feeling giddy from the feeling with the hot sun on him. Hermione appeared delighted, unable to stop herself from grinning. Once the burn began to touch his skin and make him read, he decided he was going to go for a swim. Harry would be happy with the outcome his outback swimming has caused him. He was only in his underwear when he was in the water, leaning against the rock as Hermione read. "How are you feeling?" She asked.

"Nice, I suppose. One step closer to getting Harry," he tells her.

"… what happens if he's not the same?"

Tom tried not to think about it. “Dumbledore is known for his ferocity. Harry won’t be the same, no matter what. Although, I do think the chance of recovery is high,” he tries to be hopeful, “Harry is strong, unmovable, and always moving. I think he won’t let this consume him forever. He’s too stubborn—and I will always love him, whatever he turns out to be, I will still love him.” Hermione hums sadly, Tom sitting back up on the rock, the brandy overwhelming his senses as he lays back and closes his eyes. “I think we’ll be okay by the end of it.”

“You mean alive, not okay.”

“Yes,” Tom agrees, “but alive basically means okay.”

“I suppose.”

They spent hours sleeping, reading, and swimming before the Weasleys and the Croseph’s retrieved them. Tom walked back in his underwear, holding his clothes as he let his underwear dry in the sun. He walked barefoot to the bunker before putting all his clothes back on before he entered District 13. Handing Hermione back her book, Nathaniel raising an eyebrow at him, Tom didn’t know what he was looking at. Then, he began to sniffle at his hair—which he realised—

Nathaniel leant back, shaking his head at him.

Everyone else went ahead of them and Nathaniel stayed behind to reprimand him. “You cannot be drinking, Tom.” He shrugs his shoulders, telling Nathaniel that it wasn’t even his alcohol. They walked slowly to where they were supposed to be headed, lunch. “Who was it then?” He told him. “Oh, that girl.” Nathaniel gritted his teeth. “Well, you’re going to pretend to be sick because no way are you going to train tipsy. I won’t allow it. Head back to bed, I’m going to tell the system you’re sick and you’ll restart your training tomorrow. You’re lucky the incident left you unconscious or else I don’t think this would’ve worked without questions.”

Nathaniel redirected him back to their living quarters where he touched his face. “You’re burning,” he hums, taking that notation into consideration, “perhaps I could say sun poisoning. I mean, you are luxuriously white in comparison to the rest of us. I could play it off by saying the outside wasn’t meant for you.” “Oh shut up,” he rolled over, Nathaniel grumbling how inconsiderate he was being.

“I’ll get you lunch, do not leave.”

Tom decided he wasn't going to take Nathaniel for granted any longer and to listen to what he had to say, he slept, knowing he wasn't going to get his kindness like this again. Then, he heard a familiar voice leak into the back of his dreams.

A dime for a dozen,
A crime for a sultan,
When will it ever be enough reason?
A time—all of a sudden,
A bullet without reason
When will it be declared treason?
My love, sharp like the crescent moon
My dove, coloured so blue
Why do you ruin what passion you have?

Tom's eyes opened before closing at the sound of an angel, getting up —the violins accompanying his voice, Tom slid out of bed and headed towards the balcony, it wasn't long before he locked eyes to the face on the screen. He was flabbergasted. Harry was pale, sickly pale for his complexion. His eyes had dark blue makeup with glitter, sparkling his face whilst he wore a light blue dress of a kind. He was onstage, with a microphone, singing sadly.

My dearest,
You make me the clearest
With the dark swollen skies
With the snark stolen cries
You make me the realest,
Why are you doing this for?
For me—or for you?
What should I possibly do?

Tom couldn't stay still. Hurrying over towards the stairs, he began to rush down with the voice of Harry playing in the background. Tears were building in his eyes as he hurried.

A dime, a dozen
Nighttime, broken
How long of a beatin' are you looking for?
A dime, a dozen
My love, stolen
How long are you going to hurt for?

He ran towards the cafeteria where everyone was staring at Harry singing into the microphone. Nathaniel was the first to see him and

immediately did he hold him up, Tom unable to stand as he watched him mournfully sing. His breathing was uneven and breaking, Harry looking so broken on the screen. His eyes were wild, glossy, and red. His cheeks appeared feverish. Bruises around his neck were apparent, and arms, he was getting worse. Nathaniel whispered to him, “it’s okay—it’s going to be okay,” but he couldn’t believe that. Not whilst Harry was behind that screen and being tortured. Yes, Hermione—he agreed with her, he does think it’s going to be awful—but he hopes what he said back to her was true. Harry couldn’t break, could he? What was Dumbledore doing to him that was making him appear so bad?

My dearest, my dove
My anger, my love
How long are you going to deny
—what you know is right?
How long are you going to defy
—my life?
Imply what you like
Justify what I’m like
But understand, like lullaby
I’m gone by night

Tom clawed at Nathaniel’s back at the lyrics, sobbing. “What are they doing to him?”

“I don’t know,” he tells him, “we’re going to get him out—Tom. It’s okay.”

“No, it’s not!”

He could hardly breathe, Harry not done. With his flowy-like dress, a golden thorn crown, and gold wrapped around his braid which they left, he looked like an Angel of Death. Francisca touched Tom’s back, comfortingly, trying to help Nathaniel calm him down but it wasn’t working.

A dime, a dozen
Lie, tension
How long are you going to hold off your lesson for?
A dime, a dozen
Defy, threaten
How long are you going to be seven?

Poisonous like a snake,

Ingrained for my sake,
My wrath, my wake
How long are you going to be
—my biggest mistake?
How long are you going to knee
—my heartache?
How long are you the plague?
A sickly, gagged, keep-sake?
Gone from the morning
Taken at night
My life sounds like shadows,
It won't ever sound bright

Tom hid his face in Nathaniel's chest, heaving at the lyrics. Wondering whether he was forced to say this or he had to write this. Either way, it all reminded him of what a fantastic, devilish speaker Harry was. Able to make or break someone with his words. His voice was like a song which twisted its way like honey to the deepest parts of someone's core. Convincing them of what was right and wrong, passionate about whatever he thought was right and he thought Tom was wrong.

He shook.

A dime, a dozen
Forever seven
A dime, a dozen
Forever in heaven

A dime, a dozen
Forever the greatest weapon
A dime, a dozen
Forever your villain

Tom wanted to die; he doesn't think he's ever wished for that before.

———

Blinding lights shone over him as he registered he wasn't in the arena. It was cold, nothing like the warmth of the sun, dry unlike the moist of the rainforest. Harry sat up slowly, stomach clenching and throat widening with the feeling of his stomach rejecting all the contents inside of his body. Off to the side, holding his hand against the bed as he vomited, he laid his head against the cold, metal railing - exhausted. How long was he asleep for?—did Tom's plan work?—was

this District 13? He didn't find the strength to move for a while, body getting used to being awake again. When he sat back up against the bed, he thought more people would be rushing to introduce him to the world. He thought Tom would be hugging him and they would be sharing a kiss right about now. But nobody was there, until his eyes widened at the door across from him.

In the circular window on the door, he noticed a familiar fuzzed face as it opened. Harry felt his body go cold. Dumbledore strode into the room, observing him earnestly. "Harry Potter," he nodded his head once at him. "How are you feeling?"

"Awful," he began, "why am I here?—what happened?"

Dumbledore went over to his bed, Harry's skin itching with how close he was. "Now, I was thinking perhaps you could tell me. Even if your disposed condition." He gestured to him and Harry realised how many machines are connected to him. A pressure was on his bladder and he realised a catheter must be attached to him, like the IV was. He knitted his eyebrows together, wondering how long he had been there for. Dumbledore touched his face, redirecting his chin to meet his eyes. "What do you know about the rebellion?"

Harry pursed his lips. Tom didn't tell him a lot of information in regards to what his plans were. All he knew was that was not what Dumbledore was really asking. There were undertones for the real question: how much will Tom hurt the longer I keep you here for? Harry, undoubtedly, knew it would hurt regardless of how long Dumbledore kept him there because it meant for the first time in Tom's life, he lost. He nervously shrugged his shoulders, not knowing how to answer the question. "Tom didn't want this to happen."

"Oh, I know that." Dumbledore agreed with him. "But that doesn't matter."

"Why didn't you kill me?—all those months ago."

It was bugging Harry.

All of months ago when he was being rebellious and stirring havoc in the Districts, Dumbledore didn't do anything bad to him except separate Tom and him. He could accept that for the cause but the amount of guilt and suspicion that racked itself onto him was horrendous. Harry thought Dumbledore was going to poison or silently execute him or something, but he didn't. Dumbledore gripped his chin harder. "That is understandable, you did piss me off by not

following my instructions but I can understand what young love does to someone."

"You know then, about Tom and I?"

"I knew—perhaps, too late, I'll admit." Dumbledore glared at him. "Such a fickle thing, love."

"Why did you punish him, then?"

Dumbledore smirked at him, pressing into his chin harder. "Oh?" Harry knew with the amount of pressure Dumbledore was inflicting onto his chin, it started to bleed, but Harry ignored the pain. He was strong enough too, biting down on his teeth to stop the screams. "What makes you think I won't?—I've got you to do that." Then, all of a sudden the pain disappeared, a lingering ache on his chin, Harry moving his hand so he touched the spot. But then, Dumbledore lifted his jaw so he would be able to observe him. "Pretty little thing." He breathed. "Tom was always attracted to power, wasn't he?"

He shivered at the comments. "What makes you think you will be able to punish him through me?" He asks, "I'm not going to bend over and pick up the change you fucked up with him."

Dumbledore slapped his face, shock spreading throughout his body at the quick action. He faltered. The President studied his expressions, Harry unsure of what to make of this personality change in Dumbledore, although—he bets he's the same. So malleable until defiant. So subsided until furious. "Let's make a deal," Dumbledore proposes. "For every time Tom does something out of the ordinary, rejecting his title as President, I punish you."

"You're trying to condition him—and me. Into hating him, I won't allow it."

"Oh no, Harry," Dumbledore chuckles lowly, "you don't have a choice in the matter."

Harry gulps but Dumbledore doesn't stop his torment. "I don't even need Tom to persuade you into doing my business for me, Harry. He might be there, but this entire time—I've had something that's belonged to you. My personal weapon." Dumbledore lifts the hand that's not touching his jaw to the sky and the room dimmed but through the wall, Harry could see brightness and—

"No…"

A woman with her back turned to them, was sitting on the ground with her knees to her chest. She had long, ginger hair that flowed to the ground. He trembled, before Dumbledore grabbed his jaw, turning his eyes back onto him. “See, Harry,” he beams. “I haven’t had to out best you this entire time. Torturing you was never my real goal, per sae, it’s always been torturing Tom. Fiery, defiant, power hungry young man, even when I first adopted him. I bet that was all you inside of him.” He shivered, gritting his teeth in angst. “All I had to do was out best him. Get you first, fix you all up like a broken doll, make sure you were in a condition where you were ready to be useless—or else, this whole idea of mine would break down.”

Dumbledore gestured to the air. “Did you know you contracted an illness from District 3?”

“No,” Harry answered, shaking, “was—was that the fever?”

“Of sorts. Esteven, Borgin, Burkes, they all had the vaccine for it but illness can latch themselves onto participants which then can be contracted onto others. Unfortunately enough, that was passed onto you.” Harry bet that that wasn’t true. He bet Dumbledore made sure everyone else was vaccinated than him so he was the sole body able to contract the illness. Harry bet he manipulated the Games into his favour so he could get him. Only if he was provided with the vaccine, he narrowed his eyebrows at him. “We fixed you, and to answer your question, yes. I did use biology to manipulate the Games. Clever on my part, no?”

Harry didn’t answer, turning his head back to his mother’s body. Dumbledore followed his line of sight, “ah yes. Your mother. I bet this is all new to you. I heard that you were told your parents were dead.” He shook his head as if that was amusing to him. “No, that night—I decided I was going to kill the beehive from the inside. You.”

“You knew about me?” Harry inquired, still shaking.

“Ah yes I did. Although, you weren’t registered as a citizen so technically no, I didn’t. Not until a peacekeeper from District 12 had a man called Peter Pettigrew ask for my attention. Then,” Harry’s eyes grew wide, “he told me—a woman called Lily Evans-Potter, a man called James Potter, and an infant called, Harry Potter, and a traitor to the Capitol, Sirius Black were infiltrated the Capitol and wanted to settle down and take the Capitol’s system down from the inside. So, I did what I did best. I captured and conquered the troublesome.”

“What was unfortunate was the man called Sirius Black. He wasn’t there on the night I told my peacekeepers to kill your parents, but then I decided not to. For them to capture them instead and play it out like they had been murdered.” He touched his curls, tilting his head forward. Harry couldn’t stop himself from crying. “And you were the precious bait to kill him with.”

Dumbledore sighed, “I purposefully left you outside of the Blacks Estate.”

“Afterwards, I didn’t know what had happened to you but I presumed Sirius Black took you back to the Districts. What I didn’t expect to happen was for you to end up reaped sixteen years later in District 12.” He tilted his head side-to-side, thinking. “I also didn’t expect for Tom to know you but that was on another note where I began to piece together why Tom took such an interest in you that day of the Reaping. He recognised you, and so did I.”

“Pretty little face; curls of your fathers, eyes identical to your mothers. Skin of your fathers, freckles of your mothers. Lots of little details who told me exactly who you belonged to. Harry, you might be able to change your identity in the Districts but you’re unchangeable to me. Like Tom, I can recognise those whose lives are indebted to me.”

“After a long time of observing and coming to the conclusion this was going to be the moment where I struck and finally took you to fix your mistakes, your parents mistakes, and Tom’s. You’re going to do a favour to me—your life is in my hands—and fix this little rebellion all your actions have caused.” Harry cried, Dumbledore wiping his tears. “Now, this won’t be acceptable.” He tells him, tone turning softer, “I’m not cruel without a reason—I haven’t tortured you have I?”

He didn’t know what to say.

He’s tortured so many people before; he’s tortured his parents; changed his life so significantly, it’s fundamentally changed him as a person but he supposedly did not. It was the answer he was looking for nonetheless, he gulped, nodding his head pitifully, “I suppose you haven’t.”

“Exactly,” Dumbledore tells him—handing him a lolly. “I haven’t.”

Releasing his jaw and walking away from him, Dumbledore nods at him. His mother disappears and the President tells him. “In a few days, I will request your presence. You will be a good boy until then and accept all the assistance from my workers, and you will not cause

a hassle. Every word they say and order you to do will be treated like a threat if you don't comply." Dumbledore smiles softly at him, "not to you of course. But to your dear old mother. If you go against my wishes, more pain will be inflicted onto her. You wouldn't want that, do you?"

Knowing he was manipulating him, he sighed, nodding his head at his words.

He was being held at gunpoint.

"Good boy," Dumbledore praised him — despite manipulating him to be like this.

Harry despised him, sitting there, unable to do anything.

———

He fell asleep after the incident.

When he woke up, a young man was before him, tapping his shoulder. He reminded him of Sirius for some abnormal reason. Dark blue eyes, dark black curls, the Capitol pale skin, the aristocratic facial features and demeanour, he spoke like how Harry could imagine Sirius would if he was forced to speak with the Capitol accent. "Harry Potter," the man began. "You need to be fed, sit up." Following the orders, remembering this wasn't all a dream, he sat up against the hospital bed that was tilted to help him with his back, and beside him, he noticed he was chained to the bed.

The man grabbed a wooden spoon, dipping it into some yogurt. "Open your mouth."

Doing what he was told, the young man placed the spoon into his mouth as if he was a child—but he realised what this was, them force-feeding him. He was angry at the knowledge. Taking the spoon from his mouth, the young man dipped the spoon back into the container and grabbed out some more. He waited until Harry had digested the last mouthful before he put more into his mouth. Whilst he was feeding him, the young man said, "we've taken out your catheter. You'll be expected to go to the bathroom in the attached bathroom—shower, bathe, wash yourself and do your business there. Afterwards, returning into this room. If not, we'll force you to."

"That sounds extreme."

“Mundane for the simple order we wished upon you.”

“What’s your name?”

“Open your mouth.”

Harry sighed, accepting the yogurt that was put onto his mouth, digesting it. The man kept feeding him, ignoring his previous question. Over the speaker, Harry heard the statement, “you can tell him who you are.” The young man sighed, continuing to feed him so he wouldn’t be able to ask anymore questions.

Then, the young man told him who he was. “My name is Regulus Black. I’m Sirius’s brother.”

Immediately, his eyes went wide, spitting out the yogurt that was in his mouth. “What?”

The yogurt went all over his clothes and onto Regulus’ hand. He looked disgusted at the spit and blobs of yogurt that were on his hand. He glared at him, grabbing out a napkin wiping all the yogurt from his hand before dabbing his face of all the yogurt. Harry felt embarrassed by the action. “I’m nearly thirty-five. Sirius is nearly fifty. I’ve been spying at the Academy which the President’s ex-successor went to before he went AWOL collecting information and data on him, and you. I’m going to be your carer.”

“No, I don’t want a traitor of Tom’s to be looking after me.” Harry glared at Regulus.

“You have no choice.”

Regulus went back to spoon feed him but Harry wasn’t accepting any of it. He tried to cross his arms, unable to because of the handcuffs, so it only took Regulus peeling his mouth open to stick the spoon in there, dump the contents before holding his mouth shut, and pressing his Adam’s apple for him to swallow it. “You will only make this harder for yourself if you struggle.”

Harry didn’t know why he started crying, perhaps because this was Sirius’ brother and this was the first time the two were meeting, or the fact this was his brother and he could sympathise with Sirius for wanting to leave the Capitol and starting a life in the Districts. Regulus tilted his jaw, feeding him from the spoon as he swallowed. “Stop crying,” he told him. “There’s nothing to cry over. All I’m doing is feeding you. It could be worse.”

But he couldn't help himself.

Regulus slapped him, grabbing his face at the chin.

"Sirius was a traitor to the family," Harry sniffled, bottom lip wobbling. "We had everything—we still do. The Blacks are the richest and most prosperous family in all of Panem second to Dumbledore's legacy. Andromeda, Bellatrix, Narcissa, all decided to follow the same fate as my brother. Fortunately, Aunt Druella and Uncle Cygnus have told the Capitol of the betrayal and have been left unharmed, protected against rebels." Regulus moves an inch closer to his face, a manipulation tactic Harry's willing to bet. "You've been manipulated by Sirius into thinking everything was so bad in his life when it was the total opposite. He had everything but decided to trade it for nothing."

"He's a stupid man and after he ran off, I was conceived to be the better successor of the Black's legacy. I'm the sole heir, all the Blacks running off with their lovers to find solitude somewhere else. Where the world isn't perfect and brutal to them. Suckers for pain, they are." Regulus tilted his head downwards so Harry could take the spoonful of yogurt into his mouth and swallow it. The man tilted his head back. "You will shortly find out what it means to betray the Capitol."

Harry glares at him. "My life was determined before I could think, what makes you think I betrayed the Capitol when I was a baby?"

"You're not a baby, now, are you?" Regulus asks. "You certainly don't like being treated like one."

He wants to murder him.

Regulus keeps feeding him until all the yogurt in the bowl is gone. Harry asks how he's supposed to go to the bathroom if he's chained to the bed and Regulus tells him to ask the empty room and then he'll be unchained. Not understanding what that was supposed to mean, Regulus left the room with the bowl of yogurt and spoon, Harry being left alone. He tried to fall asleep to no avail.

Days past where the treatment was the same, he would be only fed with yogurt of different flavours—until they got the knowledge into his head that he only like vanilla, drank water from the water bottle that stayed on his bed at all times—refilling oddly when he placed it back onto the side bed, and going to the bathroom. When he was released from the bed, he stayed in the bath for hours, sleeping trying to get out from the bright lights that never dimmed since that first

interaction with Dumbledore. Surprisingly, despite all of this, nothing terrible happened to him.

Harry wasn't able to see his mother; and her whole presence rocked his world. The same with the possibility his father might be alive but locked behind the walls of the Capitol, in these prison cells. The fact that Dumbledore did this to him. Made him be raised without his parents because he could've been torturing them this entire time, made him angry.

Then, one day, Dumbledore called for his presence.

Regulus came into the room with stylists of all kinds. Keeping him chained to the bed, the designers put him into clothes before deciding against and to keep him in a suit for the most part. Then, they took off his brace where they found his wedding ring. The ruby jewel on his finger. Regulus studied it. "You're engaged to Tom?"

"Yes," Harry says proudly. "I am."

"Can I have the ring?" Regulus asks. Harry immediately did not want to accept. "I cannot say whether you'll get it back but Dumbledore wants to frighten Tom and make him falter—and as a result, a ring is a small price to pay for the lack of torture he's putting onto you right now." Regulus touches his face and jaw, studying him. It was weird. Really weird because he doesn't know why he's copying the same moves Dumbledore did a few days earlier. Although, he did have a point. He wasn't tortured and he knew Dumbledore could do a lot worse so… he glanced down at the ring. "You might get it back. That's better than not so long as you're not seen with it out of this room."

"You're not sure though," Harry tells him - watching him.

"I cannot be sure. Those are not my orders."

Harry's eyes widened before deciding to give the ring to Regulus.

Tom told Harry that he had a spare ring identical somewhere so if something happened to this one, it wasn't the end of the world. Still, he didn't want to give it away. It was his. Regulus thanked him and put it into a small bag—handing it off to another stylist. Instead of the brace, they put a small clear connection to his arm that went from his three tallest fingers all the way to his wrist. "That to help you, we don't want the camera to see you with your brace on since we're trying to simulate torture."

“Why aren’t you torturing me?” Harry asks, “I feel like you should.”

“You want to be tortured?” Regulus accuses him, perplexed.

“No! Of course not, I just feel like this is weird for what’s happening.”

Regulus shrugs his shoulders, helping Harry stand up from where he was sitting so he could get redressed into his suit. The stylists began to do his face once he sat down again. He told him. “There’s no point in torturing you yet. As much as Dumbledore despises you, he’s had the chance to kill you. When you were a baby, back in the first Hunger Games, back at the Victory Tour. A handful of chances in-which he didn’t, for this. Like a fire, he wants to dim the rebellion for them to take themselves down.” Looking at himself in the mirror, Regulus held him, he explained, “if we take down Tom first — the rest will come crumbling down.”

Harry comments, “that sounds like a weak plan.”

“Perhaps, not my orders.”

At the comment, Harry smiled at Regulus knowing he agreed with him. The man stood up and left the room before coming back, with a collar of sorts. That smile that was on his face, snipped the instance he saw it. He glared at Regulus, the man heading over to him. “Harry,” Regulus begins, touching his neck, “we won’t keep it on during the interview but we have to simulate questions of torture so beforehand you’ll wear this until it creates enough of a mark to be noticeable.” Tilting his head back, Harry wanted to lash out at him before putting it on his neck but knew—this was the least they could be doing. If he complied, less would be inflicted onto his parents.

He gulped, feeling the strain on his throat. “You’re done,” Regulus told him, “come.”

“An interview?”

“The simplest act of conversation for this occasion.”

“Who am I doing it with?”

“Who do you think?”

Regulus clipped a leash to the ring of the collar, walking him essentially, but he wasn’t told to crawl or anything so he accepted it. It took thirty minutes to leave the basement and entered what Harry

recognised as the Mansion. It was luxurious as Regulus told Harry, “Tom had all of this but he decided to trade it for you. What an idiot. Too much Black influence, I think.” Regulus entered another room where a man was sitting on the couch with a glass of whiskey. The man’s eyes focused on Harry and Regulus when he saw them. Harry wondered who he was.

The man gulped, “did Dumbledore say for him to be leashed?”

“Explicitly; cause internal conflict.”

“Who are you?”

“Did we let you speak, Harry?” Regulus asked, turning his head back to him.

“Oh, his tongue hasn’t been cut out.” The man said. “Pity.”

Regulus shakes his head. “He has too gorgeous of a voice to cut it out —Dumbledore said not to do anything with him until he decides what should happen. Ergo, why is Barty’s presence here.” He cringed, rolling his eyes. “I really wished he would poison Barty and get it over with but no, of course not, Crouch Senior wouldn’t have that.”

The man pulled on his leash, Harry moving towards where he was walking to. The next room over. “Severus, goodbye.”

“Suppose I’ll be seeing you soon enough. Regulus,” lifting the glass to him as if he earned it.

Harry walked with Regulus into the next room where Barty was sitting, all done up and ready to shoot. He was glad Regulus wasn’t all manipulated by the Capitol’s ways and saw that Barty wasn’t a likeable character. When Barty saw Harry, he tilted his head to the side, glancing down at the collar. Then, a sideways grin appeared onto his face, pleased. Harry glared at him. “Harry,” Barty purred. “Lovely to see that you’re collared. A feisty thing like you needs to be.”

“Fuck off, Barty.” He bit.

Regulus turned to Harry. “Quiet.”

Sitting on a chair, outside of the view of the camera, Regulus tied his leash there—Barty snickering at the predicament. Then, the door opened and Barty’s eyes turned to the noise, tilting his head, raising his eyebrows in surprise. Regulus came back over to Harry. “One

move out of line, she dies." Harry's eyes went wide as his mother was blindfolded, gagged, collared, and on her knees before them. Regulus whispers, "don't make it too obvious to the camera either. Dumbledore wants them to know something is happening but won't alert them on who it is either. Barty doesn't know who she is. Don't tell him either."

He turns his head to him, undoing the collar. "If I was a worse man in Dumbledore's position, your hands would have mitten on them so you would be able to take them off."

"That's smart," Harry agrees, "why doesn't he?"

Regulus whispers, "to see what you'll do, of course."

Eyes widening, Regulus moving him onto the chair, he tells him to stay put until the end of the interview. Once he's told he can move from the chair, he can but he'll have to come straight back to Regulus. Then, he'll take him back to his room. Trying to keep put, the camera not recording yet, Barty chuckles. "Need someone to be put at gunpoint for you to be compliant? Damn."

"Keep talking and I'll cut your throat out."

"How kinky," Barty purred, "did Tom teach you?"

"I don't need him to."

Barty shook his head with delight as if tormenting him was the funniest thing in the world. Sadist. Then, they were recording. "It's lovely to see you again, Harry Potter. I think the last time we spoke we were on bad terms. I'm quite glad to see that's cleared up." Harry glanced off the screen to Regulus, wondering what the fuck Barty was going on before he nodded at him once, and Harry accepted that, nodding before turning back to the camera. He tried not to look at his mother on the ground who must not have a clue what was going on. "Now, there's been a lot of speculation about what happened that fateful day in the arena. Perhaps we should talk about it."

"Lets." Harry gritted his teeth, wanting to kill him.

At his reaction, Barty smirked harder.

"Actually before we start talking about the arena, I think we should talk about a controversial topic at the moment. People in the Capitol and in the Districts are speculating that you and Tom were in a

relationship. Perhaps, you could give us some insight about that and what truly occurred there." Then, with a curt tone, Barty asked. "What is your relationship with Tom?"

Harry wanted to slit his throat, wanted to punch the life out of him, wanted to strangle him, destroy Barty for what he was making him go through. Turning off-camera to Regulus, eyeing his mother, he shuttered, knowing what he was going to have to do. "Nothing—we're nothing."

Fidgeting with his fingers, unsure of how he was supposed to go about this, Barty was keen on milking him for all the reactions he could produce. He tried to keep his cool. "What is Tom proclaiming then? About you two being lovers and having an affair together pre-Games, knowing each other before the Games, and this trip to 12 he took after your Games?" Harry almost wanted to choke at that knowledge. Tom told everyone about their relationship?—or was Barty deciding to expose them to the world. Either way, he was confused. What was Tom up to?

Harry gritted his teeth thinking about going with the former. He wasn't about to let Barty out them, and hoped Tom at least had the common sense to break the news to everyone before him. He thought quickly, nodding his head. If the Capitol wanted him to be mean, then he would be mean. They haven't done anything to him yet and his mother is at gunpoint… he needs to think quickly for himself and her. Tom is safe. The rebellion won't die with his words, not if Tom is speaking for him. He needs to think like a victor—a Career. "It meant nothing."

He pursed his hands together, hoping to emphasise his words with his actions.

"I was using him for my own personal gains." Glancing up to the camera, narrowing his eyes at them, he tried to explain it as if he was truthfully. "My parents were traitors of the Capitol and as a result, the Capitol sent them to their deaths. I was an orphan. That's the truth. So was Tom."

Thinking about how he could really sell the story, if everyone was already safe in District 13, and he was trying realistically to do everything he could to survive, what would he say? He thought about it then began to relay the story Regulus told him about Sirius back to the audience. If anything, if he were to believe it, so should they. "I was manipulated at a young age by a man, my proclaimed

godfather… Sirius Black, friends of my parents, to get me out of the Capitol and take me as far away as he could." He tucked a curl behind his ear. "I left, once I heard Tom was taken in by the President, the very man who executed my parents under treason. I didn't want to be caught up in the secrets of them. So I left with him and went to District 12 where I registered and lied about my citizenship. Fortunately, my godfather was a peacekeeper so we didn't get caught. Not until I became a tribute in the Games." Enough truth and lie to keep everyone on the edge of their seats was necessary, he thought.

Dumbledore would like the story that came out of his mouth at the very least.

"Ah, understandable. The young are quite susceptible to the influence at such a young age." Barty touched the couch, trying to get closer to Harry—to show how they were connected with his idea. As if the Capitol wasn't influencing the children of the Districts to want to be victor, as if the Capitol wasn't influencing its own children of the glory of the Games. "So… the rumours are to be met with answers, Harry. What happened that night in the arena?"

Fuck, a headache was growing at the front of his mind, building because of how much he was lying. This was sickening in his opinion but he had to toughen it out. It wasn't the worst thing to happen in the world to him. He pursed his lips, wondering about what would be an acceptable answer for both parties. "I'm not sure." He looked up at Barty. "All I knew was one minute the arena was spinning, my fever slowly sentencing me to my death - the illness I contracted from District 3—" he decided to tell them because it wasn't a lie, "which the Capitol fortunately healed for me, and the next an explosion sent both Gleam and I asleep. I've heard it was Hermione's doing… due to the rebellion influence, I'm sure."

He was lowering his voice purposefully as if to plead his case.

"I… I was not involved with the plans, nor was Gleam, or the Careers or, I don't know. I couldn't name who was involved, but I know I wasn't happy - because I didn't want anyone to die like Esteven proposed. The Games are to kill fairly." Stuttering and murmuring words were signs of truth and weakness in speeches. It's why Dumbledore never stuttered, nor did he, whenever he sang, because it's supposed to allude to a truth whilst being a lie—his biggest strength but this. Acting as weaker than his larger enemy brings a false sense of security, what they're looking for. "And there were only three tributes left besides our group. We were going to have to eventually begin to kill ourselves from within. I was afraid and so was

Gleam and Hero. We didn't have a clue what was going on - and I'm presuming Tom was doing his own manipulations onto me. As a result, I had no idea what was happening."

"Ah, well I'm glad we cleared this up." Barty said, gesturing his hand to Harry then at the camera. "We don't like falsely accused notions for no reason."

Haha, very funny—asshole.

Harry laughed at that, wanting to kill Barty. "Yes, I'm grateful."

"But… I do feel like I have to ask… what are your opinions about this rebellion? It's certainly for no reason, is it not?" Barty brought up, slyly, as if Harry wouldn't notice where this direction of conversation was heading. He inhaled and exhaled before he answered, to calm himself down, and calculatingly answered. He's already lied most of this interview, who is a few more lies going to hurt? Glancing off to the side, it would hurt his mother if he didn't answer with a lie.

He sadly smiled at the screen. He hoped Tom wasn't watching, and if he did, he was proud of him. "I've been manipulated and abused by many parental-like figures. If anything, Tom has been too. He was always smart, but not with his heart. It was precious. To even me, I'll admit. The rebellion is only going to cause more deaths. Unnecessary deaths, like my parents. Why make more child orphans? We certainly didn't like that in the Capitol—why would the Districts wouldn't be any different?" Harry didn't know whether or not these jumble of words were going to convince anyone of his story; but he's in a predicament and doesn't want to fuck it up for himself. Not for his mother, nor for his hidden away father.

Barty grins at him as if he said the right thing. He bows his head to him, Harry feeling like the smile was genuine. How fucked up was that? Barty held out his hand for the camera to see, Harry picking up he wanted the audience to see their alliance. He pursed his lips, deciding to dice him after this was all over. Murder him cold-blooded in his sleep. Harry grinned at the thought, deciding to shake his hand once. He was going to die for Tom. "Thank you for coming on the show Harry, I know this must've been hard for you," not that you would care, "with how Tom is acting ridiculous in the Districts. I think he's drunk on power."

He nodded his head sharply, angry at the comment.

"No problem, as a victor - truth in the arena is for all to see."

He got up from the chair, waving at the camera cheekily, before leaving off to the side.

Once he was off-camera, Regulus clipped the collar back into place, attaching the leash to him. Harry glared at Regulus, the man seeming to do that with ease. “Good job,” he told him - their eyes meeting. “Perhaps your mother won’t die if you keep this up.”

“I’ll murder you if you do.”

“Oh how sweet, you are.”

Chapter End Notes

🤦‍♀️🤦‍♀️ I forgot about where this fanfic goes. Buona Fortuna @Hana09Meinhas it gets much much worse.

TRIGGER WARNING PEOPLE ABOUT THE UPCOMING CHAPTERS.

I don't have an uploading schedule yet. But I might upload something for Christmas... but maybe not? Just know I'll get back into posting soon, probably after Christmas. // I love comments people, they entertain me so gracias to everyone who has given me comments on this fanfic over the past few months!! Also 8.5k hits!! and over 150 subs, thank you to all of you who are keeping up with the fanfic :0 night night

P S

my tears ricochet & The Albatross

Chapter Summary

Posted: 31st of December, 2024

TRIGGER WARNING: the non-con
TRIGGER WARNING: NONCON
TRIGGER WARNING: IT DOESN'T GO INTO GREAT DETAIL BUT STILL DETAIL NONETHELESS
TRIGGER WARNING: sexual assault

Chapter Notes

TRIGGER WARNING ⚠
TRIGGER WARNING ⚠

TORTURE

Last day of 2024,,
I'm not sure what I'd like to say on the matter. I won't be able to write much (long ffs) until after 2026 so I will have to post what I have until then. Year 11 & 12 get more serious and I do want to get a high score to get into uni. This fic will be finished mid 2025, probs, but it just depends how much time I have to post. I can't wait to read Haymitch's games... and that's it. Enjoy. Read trigger warnings!!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Regulus didn’t take the collar off; when he asked, he told him Dumbledore wanted for him to keep it on. He was clipped to the hospital bed like some kind of dog and slept, attached to the railing. At least he wasn’t handcuffed, he decided, able to go to the bathroom whenever he wanted. Harry’s concept of time was muddled. He couldn’t tell how many days had first passed since his capture, nor couldn’t tell how long it had been since the interview. Regulus kept feeding him and Harry found he wasn’t resisting it. It was yogurt like usual.

“Why… why do I feel weird?” Harry asked, yawning.

“Don’t you remember?” Regulus appeared perplexed by the question.

“You thrashed out at the interview and Dumbledore had it ordered that we keep you under sedatives until you calmed down. From the looks of it, it’s still in your system,” he politely tells him. “Give it a few days and you’ll feel better,” he smiled at him sadly, “sorry I can’t do anything to make you feel better.”

“That’s…” he yawned again, shutting his eyes.

Pain. His body erupted with pain. Screaming, he scratched at his skin trying to get it off him.

“Fuck,” he heard someone say, “I thought it was stronger?”

“Who knows with him. He said he was like a medic back at his District —perhaps he had drugs.”

Harry opened his eyes, only to see blurriness. Someone must’ve taken out his contacts. He tried to punch whoever was dragging him across the floor, getting kicked in the stomach, “mutt.” Then, his throat was being yanked, Harry having a coughing fit as he was picked up and restrained. “Cute little thing, can see why Tom liked you.” He shook, panicked and kept trying to thrash his way out of their arms. He sobbed, body completely in pain. “Fuck, such a pain like him too.”

“Awe,” another voice entered the room, “you boys having trouble?”

“Shut up, Melia."

Then, his entire vision went dark as something was latched, covering his eyes. “Couldn’t blindfold him?” She taunted. The girl picks Harry up whilst restraining him. “After handling his bitch of a mother enough, I think I can say—mother like son.” Growling at her comment, trying to get her from him, she laughs as if this was expected to, touching him around his thighs and groins, murmuring into his ear. “If you keep struggling, *boy*,” as if he was a dog, “the more it’ll hurt.” She stopped touching him down there, turning him around with his hands together — holding them to keep him from moving, and kept him stable with her other hand. Melia murmured to the room. “Add more sedatives to his collar please.”

“Fuckin’ Regulus,” he grumbled, *false sense of security—his ass.*

“What about Regulus, pretty littl’ thing?” Melia purred, kissing his forehead. “An annoyance?”

“For fuck sake, Melia. Take him to the Chambers.”

“Sure, dickface.”

She takes him through different rooms, Harry wanting to bite the fuck out of her. Melia purrs, nuzzling her face against his. “I wouldn’t think about doing that, *boy*, I’ll kill your mother if you even think about biting me. *Oh*, or if you did I would gag you and let every person in the entire Capitol who wanted you to have a piece of you—whilst blindfolded, gagged, and tied up. What a lovely idea, although I don’t think Tom would like that, would he? Such a pretty pet he has. Don’t you think? Harry’s quite a dog name.” He growled at her before she slapped his face.

“Try that again on me, I will go back on my threat.”

He fell silent, not wanting that to happen to him.

“Good boy.”

———

For hours, they kept going back and forth, torturing him with the drugs in his system called “TrackerJacker Venom.” And every time, he protested, Melia kept touching him around his genitals more provocatively until he would stop, then calling him good boy, before continuing the torture process. Then, they stopped. Left blindfolded in the room, vomiting, and choking on his own tears, he shook violently. But then, the door clicked open. “Please—l-l-leave me alone.”

“Up we get,” a familiar voice returns to him.

“Fuck off, Regulus!”

“It’s an order, Harry.” He grabs both sides of him and Harry can’t do anything but accept what he was doing to him because his body rejected, revolted with any movements of his own. Regulus didn’t take him far, taking all his clothes from him and letting him go to the bathroom before washing him in the bathtub, still blindfolded and collared. Harry shook at the kind contact, and afterwards, was changed into soft silk pyjamas. Then, was brought back to the same room — the distance between them, the same. “Until ordered again, Harry.”

Harry cried out for him, left on the floor but his body didn’t accept the movement and he landed face-first into the ground, whacking his

nose. He had another coughing fit, pawing at his blindfold to take it off. Noticing his own blood before him, he vomited off to the side again, unable to help himself. He passed out.

The process kept repeating itself; Melia, Sextus, and Cosmas kept torturing him over and over again. Until eventually, he stopped seeing the pain but instead - saw Tom. Memories, Melia liked *to call them of Tom. Of them.* Tom pushed him from the top of the Tribute's Centre, Harry falling. Tom punched him repeatedly in the stomach, calling him a "mutt." Tom kept saying how he was unlovable, disgusting, a monster. Tom kept telling how he was something bought and sold. How his body was made for everyone. *Tom kept touching him*—he screamed and thrashed, all of these memories repeating itself. All over again. Until they restarted.

Tom appeared in his dreams, telling him how he was dating Narcissa, or Bella, or Evans, or Nott, or Lucius, or Lestrange, or *fucking*—Nathaniel. Tom kept telling him how he was worthless and that it was the worst decision in the world for him to betray him like he had. Harry didn't know what he was speaking about, but he kept saying it. Over and over. Kisses began, he didn't know who they were from, but they weren't Tom's. Tom's were sweet, soft, rough and hard when needed. When possessive; those kisses were demeaning, sickly, poisonous unlike his fiancé's. Although, his face was there all the same.

"You're so annoying."

"You're quite stupid."

"Have I ever told you you're like a mutt?"

"Ah, so cute, like a baby."

"I don't think you've had a single complex thought, ever."

"Maybe I haven't either since I picked *you*."

Over and over, the scenarios repeated themselves. Where Harry's drowning, Tom doesn't save him. Where Harry's burning, thrashing, calling out for help, but Tom doesn't help. Where Tom plunges knives, axes, tridents deep into his body—and he bleeds out, trying to call out for him.

Regulus picks up the pieces left behind by the tortures. “You’re okay,” he would murmur. “You’re okay,” but he couldn’t stop panicking—trying to get away from the—Regulus shushed, picking him up and letting him cry as he took him to the bathroom where he let him do his business before bathing him, washing him in the bath. Then, whilst he was still in there, he fed him yogurt. Harry hated yogurt. Regulus fed him spoonfuls, touching his face, his skin, kept touching him loving as if there was something between them; but Harry hated Regulus, but he still kept looking further past him. Not at him, he realised, at someone else.

“Come on, up we get,” Regulus would wrap a fluffy towel around him and he stood there like a kid, not knowing what to do. Then, he would change him into another pair of pyjamas. Once changed, Harry latched himself onto Regulus not wanting him to go.

“Don’t go—don’t go—please—don’t—don’t go—“

“Harry,” he hushed him, petting his hair. “I have to.”

“No—no-no-no-no, don’t—please-don’t—“

“You can stay with him,” a voice says over the speaker.

Regulus turns before he kneels down on the ground, bringing Harry who attached himself to him, wetting his chest as he tries to search for more comfort, down with him. The man wrapped his firm arms around him, whispering, “you’re okay, Harry. You’re here and you’re alive. Shhhh, it’s alright. I’m not going anywhere.” Harry hiccuped, tears streaming down his face, unable to breathe properly. He was asleep before Regulus left, who continued to stroke his hair and hold his face and tell him *it was okay*.

It wasn’t, it really wasn’t.

Over the next couple of days, he was given a notebook and a pen. Regulus told him what would happen if he tried to stab himself with it, that his mother would be executed, but Harry got the message, he didn’t need to tell him. Somewhat comforted by Regulus’ presence, who sat with him on the floor as he was told to write a song, knowing he wasn’t going to get tortured until afterwards—he focused on the lyrics. He asked if he would have accompaniment with the lyrics, Regulus debating if he could come up with something like that in time. He told him he had a week and that until then, he had time to

write anything he wanted to include.

Coming up with a beat to the song easily enough, he began to write what the Capitol, Dumbledore wanted to tell the Districts. To stop the rebellion, to stop what they were doing, but in the perspective of Harry, to tell Tom to stop because they were hurting him. Regulus asked what he was planning to write and advised that perhaps, to tell them that he might die soon, to see how they would react. Not knowing how to respond to that, Regulus retorted, "*orders*. But that would give the Capitol a good idea at how much influence Tom has over 13. M'kay?"

He agreed solely because he didn't know if he was going to get tortured if he didn't. It took hours of his time, trying to write something down. Regulus read over what he wrote, "a dime for a dozen, a crime for a sultan, when will it ever be enough reason?—I think I like this," he commends, Harry flushing nervously. "You are quite talented, I don't think they were mistaken."

"Although, that song you sang at the interview wasn't the real thing was it?"

"No—*no*, it wasn't but I didn't like Barty so…"

Regulus snickered, continuing to read over the lyrics. "I like the first stanza. A time—all of a sudden, a bullet without reason," he hissed as if that burnt him, "quite delicious these words. When will it be declared treason?—is a nicely put way of trying to end the rebellion, I applaud you." Regulus points his finger at him, "you remind me of someone I once knew."

"Oh?" Harry tilted his head. "Who?"

"I can't say their name or their identity but they had the same talent as you."

"A Capitol singer?"

Regulus nodded his head, smug, as if he somewhat didn't believe what he was telling Harry. He accepted the small praise, having his notebook given back to him. He spent a lot more time writing the lyrics, Regulus reading over them. He gaped at what he said, "a dime, a dozen - nighttime, broken - how long of a beatin' are you looking for?—is devastating." Regulus snorted, passing it back to him. "Okay, you've got to tell me your thought process behind this now, so long as it doesn't hinder your thinking."

Harry accepts the request, knowing it was because Regulus was genuinely interested in what he had to hear. “There’s a pattern in the lyrics. There are always patterns. We call the different parts, ABCD, but they’re substituted for their meanings. Chorus, verse, bridge, etcetera… we use them to be able to work out what happens in a song and the patterns with them can be different. So a dime for a dozen is A, the next will be B since it’s a chorus, no matter how similar it is to the verse. I was thinking I start the verse as if I was speaking to Tom.”

“You could call him a pet-name, perhaps?” Regulus suggests, Harry shivering. “Something you’d actually call him—nothing like what the others call you.”

The lyrics melted underneath his hand, Harry humming out the pattern of methody he was following whilst writing it. By the end, he handed Regulus the final copy. Harry spoke up, “I was thinking violin and other string instruments could accompany me.” Regulus asks if he could sing it for him, bringing out his phone where he would record and he’d see what he’d be able to do.

Harry softly smiled, before reading the lyrics.

After recording him sing, Regulus kissed his forehead gently before leaving the room. The kiss was his goodbye, Harry sitting there, bored as all hell. Doodling in the notebook, he drew District 12 and tried to picture what his friends looked like. He didn’t even try to draw Tom, knowing all that would show up would be nightmares. He knitted his eyebrows together at the thought of him. Struggling to digest Tom, he gulped, gritting his teeth together. Think of someone else—think of someone else.

After a while, he was able to go back to his drawing, trying to picture how he looked. With a collar around his neck, bruises all over his body, fragile—only consuming yogurt, he must appear weak. They wanted him weak so he was easier to handle. Break. He shivered, narrowing his eyes, drawing the house. He was pissed off when his pen ran out of ink and asked if he could get another, a pen from underneath the floor rolled out and landed near him. He thanked the person and got the pen from the ground, going back to doodle and write. Distracting himself, happily.

He was on his stomach, legs folded over so they were laying on his calves as he wrote more lyrics to other songs. He hummed out the melodies and softly sung the words he wrote, “a crime for me, a pine for the sea, can’t help but dreaming of he.” He kept flicking the pen

against the ground to create a beat for him to follow, “the key for free, the buzz of a bee, can’t help but scheme for we.” He smiled, knowing it was atrocious and that there was no meaning to what he was singing, but it entertained him enough to keep him from dying of boredom.

Regulus returned a few days later to feed him yogurt and to show him the recording of the violins, and other instruments he didn’t know the names of in the background. He nodded his head to the beat, listening to how he sang in the backing to the rhythm, telling Regulus it was perfect.

He practiced with the recording of no sound—making sure he had all the lyrics memorised before the performance. The morning of the concert, he was naked, being waxed everywhere. When Harry asked around it, gritting his teeth at the pain, Regulus told him “Dumbledore wanted you to be like this. Hairless.” He gritted his teeth and accepted it for his parents’ sake, anxious as he was rubbed with lotion in a way that felt lewd. As if they were trying to make him feel worse, more humiliated, they slid a dress over-top his head. It was a floor-length navy, almost-black, gown, that absorbed all the lights around him. It made him seen when he didn't want to. Harry felt like he was going to be sick, Regulus giving him an apologetic look. “It’s to make you more provocative. Dumbledore wants Tom to think something bad is happening to you.”

“Something bad is happening to me,” Harry snaps. “I didn’t ask to be tortured, Regulus!”

“Mhm,” Regulus eyes him, intrigued, humming, “something worse, then.”

He frowns, exhausted with everyone’s bullshit when they begin to do his eye makeup. Regulus reassures him that if he were to cry onstage it would "win the Capitol over" ... the stylists cutting his hair, staring, as Harry's anxiety only grew. Despite this, they kept the braid and entangled it with gold. Regulus leaves, saying that he’ll be back for him when it is time to go. Harry, by the stylists, told that his collar is going to come off for the performance but that snipers will be on him if he tries anything funny. They tell his mother will be held at gunpoint again; Harry shaking.

“Cheer up, my dear,” one of the stylists told him. “You look perfect.”

His curls were curling, his lips were glossy with lipgloss, his eyelids

were a dark blue. There were bruises all over his neck and throat in the shape of kisses and hickies, Harry realising what they were meant to represent. But, they were wrong.

They kept touching him. Melia, especially.

He touched his body softly, painfully. This was punishment for being with Tom. For being the child of Lily and James Potter. For being Sirius' godson. He didn't ask for any of it but Tom. Tom is special - he doesn't know why they're trying to take him from him.

He knows why, but he doesn't want to accept there are people like this in the world.

A stylist wipes the stray tear from his eye. "No time for crying, my dear. Not right now."

Regulus returns, taking his leash and walking him to the Interview Building where everyone was preparing themselves for him. Dressed in a red suit, the man appeared dashing—a comparison to his everyday look. Regulus was freshly shaven instead of the stubble he had normally. His curls tamed despite its normal frizz; he looked put together like a noble. Regulus brought him backstage where he met all of the instrumental players. They welcomed him before Regulus ushered him to where he would enter from.

The crowd was wild, buzzing with energy. Regulus touched Harry's crown at one point, a soft ring of golden thorns the stylists had placed onto his head, with thought."You're going to see a sight you don't like out there, use it as motivation to push you further with your performance."

"Worse than you guys have already put me through?" Harry judges.

"Yes, worse. You're meeting your father."

Harry stills. "James?"

"Yes. Stay nonchalant about it if you want them both to live."

Regulus plays around with his outfit before putting both hands onto his shoulders. It was like he could tell inner turmoil was brewing within Harry. "If you behave and you're good, you might get to meet your parents at a later stage." He touches his two cheeks briefly, "I know you will be so here," Regulus unclips the collar he wasn't game to take off since he had it on. "I will keep a hold of this and after the

performance come straight back here to me. We'll go back to your room." Harry nods his head, a brief kiss to his forehead before Regulus slides off to the side, other people there to watch Harry for him.

Waiting, it wasn't until Barty shouted out his name and the crowd erupted into excitement and cheers that he walked on. He was glancing at where he was going, trying not to trip over himself.

His breathing was heavy, looking at his feet so he could avoid the inevitable for as soon as possible, but then—he glanced up with screams of his name and his title, meeting the eyes of his parents. Dressed in gorgeous clothes, holding hands, the two watched him. He felt embarrassed, dressed like this about to sing a song against everything that they meant, but he had to. So nothing bad would happen to them. *And him*, went silent.

Guns were pressed to their heads nonchalantly, nobody saying a word about it. He glanced behind him at the instrumentalists, who nodded their heads back at him. Barty said his goodbyes before Harry spoke, "lovely to see you again, *Capitol*. Panem. This is a new song that I created called, a dime, a dozen. Interpret it how you'd like but I've got my beautiful performers behind me, who are going to accompany me to this song so I hope you enjoy it."

He glanced down at his parents, mouthing *mum, dad*.

His father grinned grimly up at him, nodding his head as if he was proud of him.

He cleared his throat before singing the song. The music starts.

A dime for a dozen,
A crime for a sultan,
When will it ever be enough reason?
A time—all of a sudden,
A bullet without reason
When will it be declared treason?
My love, sharp like the crescent moon
My dove, coloured so blue
Why do you ruin what passion you have?

Regulus liked the lines where he was going back and forth with 'reason/treason' saying how poetic it was, and the mentions of a lover in the midst of the stanza. That the rhyme hid what the meaning was to the Capitol but everyone else would understand. He also liked the

‘a time, all of a sudden, a bullet without reason’ because he was trying to emphasise how meaningless the war was. Harry didn’t think that, but thought the Capitol was doing this for no good reason, only selfish desires they wanted to keep; power-hungry families with too much money for them to handle. Too much control.

My dearest,
You make me the clearest
With the dark swollen skies
With the snark stolen cries
You make me the realest,
Why are you doing this for?
For me—or for you?
What should I possibly do?

A dime, a dozen
Nighttime, broken
How long of a beatin’ are you looking for?
A dime, a dozen
My love, stolen
How long are you going to hurt for?

The last line was true. How long was Tom going to hurt for? He sniffled, tears gathering in the corners of his eyes naturally. Everytime he thought of him, it was pain. Of him being thrown off a building, and him not willing to save him, of him stabbing him hundreds of times, happy to laugh in his face at his cries, of him doing things he wouldn’t normally do. Where was he?

His head began to bobble to the sound of the beat, acting as if this was the worst thing that has ever happened to him. His voice was overwhelmed, overpowered by emotion; closing his eyes when he got too frustrated with those feelings. He bet Dumbledore was loving his performance, starved for Tom’s attention, starved for his anger.

Squeals and reactions from the crowd kept him going, knowing at the end of the day, this was a performance for his leverage as much as it was the Capitol’s. So long as he acted like he was trapped, captured, and slaved to doing the Capitol’s bidding—everything would be okay. Be manipulative, he told himself, be selfish. That’s what they wanted him to do. Be everything you’re not; it’s okay. They’ll understand. Music is a weapon he’s willing to weaponise.

My dearest, my dove
My anger, my love

How long are you going to deny
—what you know is right?
How long are you going to defy
—my life?
Imply what you like
Justify what I'm like
But understand, like lullaby
I'm gone by night

Regulus liked the last part of the stanza, saying Tom was going to cry for him. If that was anything good to want to happen, but he accepted it as "it" being Tom's love for him. He acted as if he was a puppet being pulled and turned around on stage, the crowd eating it up. Like a small doll, unable to control the actions of itself. Pitiful, like a dying flower. Like he couldn't even think for himself.

His parents were watching with bemusement; emotional stares.
They were loving him, even without words.

Harry cried, not wanting this to be the last time he ever saw them.

A dime, a dozen
Lie, tension
How long are you going to hold off your lesson for?
A dime, a dozen
Defy, threaten
How long are you going to be seven?

The whole aspect of the number seven was because it was easy to rhyme with, as well as the age seven itself. Being called seven means being called a child (...who doesn't know how to think for themselves) —the reason why Harry was calling Tom seven. As if he was like him, picked for no good reason at all besides being rebellious. He was convincing both himself and the audience of who Tom was. Nothing more than who Dumbledore was making him out to be.

The next lines were quite funny and sad, in his opinion, able to burn the lines to his skin.

Captured. Tormenting. Lively. Writhing little creatures.

Poisonous like a snake,
Engrained for my sake,
My wrath, my wake
How long are you going to be
—my biggest mistake?

How long are you going to knee
—my heartache?
How long are you the plague?
A sickly, gagged, keep-sake?
Gone from the morning
Taken at night
My life sounds like shadows,
It won't ever sound bright

He doesn't wipe his eyes, allowing the mascara to flow down his face where it touched his lips, his chin and dripped onto his dress. The instruments emphasised every word he spoke, the audience overcome with emotions. He gazed up to the masses, the crowd cheering for him as if they didn't know he was performing a song. As if this was something to cheer for him at. He ignores them, eyes back on his parents, dead to the world. They looked gorgeous and aged fantastically. His parents looked like their twenty year-old selves, only older. He wondered if Regulus was talking about his father because besides Harry, he didn't know who else had his gift.

The glitter was layering his face, lipgloss making the words flow from his lips easier. For the final part of the song, the instrumentals went wild.

A dime, a dozen
Forever seven
A dime, a dozen
Forever in heaven

He paused, looking up from his parents to the camera.

A dime, a dozen
Forever the greatest weapon
A dime, a dozen
Forever your villain

The music didn't stop playing after Harry finished singing, continuing to play their bit until the song was finally over. The entire time he was up there, he pretended to be a damsel in distress, traumatised like Dumbledore wanted him to be. For Tom.

It didn't take long until he spoke again without the music behind him, softly speaking. "I hoped everyone loved my performance tonight, Capitol, Districts, Panem." He nodded his head, the crowd screaming and yelling for him like he was their world. Harry supposed he was,

the Capitol too dazed with trends and fads that they were too blind to see the real world. Who he stood for. “I will see you later,” he waved —heading off to where Regulus said to meet him.

Once backstage, Harry had his collar clipped back onto his neck and Regulus told him he did an amazing job, taking him back to his prison. He ignored the faces of people he didn’t want to remember, listening to the playbacks of his song as he crossed the barricade from the Interview’s Building to the Tribute’s Centre. Then, they headed underground where Harry was controlled by Regulus’ choices. “From now on,” Regulus told him, “you’ll be staying here.”

“Who’s… is anyone else going to be with me?”

“Gleam, Ceres, some other people.”

“Were they the ones to be caught besides me?”

“Yes.”

Regulus tugged on his collar, gritting his teeth. “Unfortunately, I can’t say these next few days will be pleasant for you unless you obey. Dumbledore has a keen interest in sadism for the people he picks to be torturers, and they can’t keep their hands to themselves.” Harry freezes, Regulus noticing his fear. “Come, you won’t be touched more than you already have been. I can’t see Dumbledore jeopardising your life like that. Although, it won’t be pleasant nonetheless.”

Harry has to ask. “Why?—why choose this?”

The Black shrugs his shoulders. “I didn’t. When I was fifteen and Sirius left, I was picked in a private program and have been kept in it ever since. Usually, I don’t do this kind of work but seeing as I’m Sirius Black’s little brother the Potters have been a special case for me. James, your mother, you, and…” he purses his lips, Harry raising an eyebrow at that. “Just you lot, ‘cause of Sirius. Apparently, Dumbledore likes that aspect where I intimidate and torment you with my presence.”

“Do you get paid?”

“Yes,” he agrees. “A lot, ‘though most don’t do it for the pay. I do.”

“How much?”

“For your life?—around ten million.”

Harry blinked, mortified. “It depends on the life?”

Regulus snickers at his torment, shaking his head. “No. It is annual. I get paid ten million yearly. Although, my pay gets raised to twenty-five million next year.” Harry was bewildered at that information. He noticed his confusion, “although, I don’t torture people unless I’m explicitly asked. Usually, I spy or I hunt out rebels in the Districts or hack systems. Depends on what is necessary really, but I’ve been put on you.”

Before they entered the next room, Regulus said to Harry that he needed to blindfold him and that he was to keep it on until someone else took it off for him. He gulped, knowing torture was on its way when he said that. Taking ahold of his leash, he followed Regulus to where he would be "staying". He told him to sit on the bed so he did. “I will see you later, Harry.”

“My… my ring… is it disposed of?”

“Time will tell, Harry.”

The click of the door told him he was alone.

People kept touching him, his head being dunked into water repeatedly, being electrocuted—he kept screaming, trying to breathe. They kept murmuring words into his ears, *“such a good boy” “look at how cute he screams” “so precious” “you think they’ll let me touch him?” “Aw how gorgeous” “boy” “mutt” “disaster” “disappointment.”* He shivered, all the words getting to him as they kept touching his body. It wasn’t only the water, **Tom *was* back.**

“You would’ve thought they would’ve killed you by now?”

“Lost your ring?—well, you weren’t really mine to begin with.”

“You like when they touch you like that, don’t you?”

“Heh, you don’t have a clue how pitiful and weak you look, slave.”

Harry thrashed, trying to get him away from him. Pain- that's all that he associated with him- pain. He kept trying to attack him but he only got double the pain back, screaming. Lips were to his neck and his voice rung back, *“you don’t actually think you don’t deserve this—do you? Broken, undeserving, unloveable is who you are. What those people*

are doing to you is pleasurable in comparison to what you deserve. Cry, Harry, sob for me." He shook and wasn't able to stop them from hurting him.

He felt like dying.

When he wasn't being tortured, screams were all he heard. Feminine screams, masculine screams. He became accompanied to all the emotions the other prisoners felt. Chained to his bed, fed by Regulus and his sorry little wooden spoon full of only yogurt, he told him. "I want to die. Don't try to convince me otherwise. I know I want to die." His expression didn't change and he kept feeding Harry the yogurt, eyes noticeably swollen. Harry, himself was too exhausted to cry anymore.

Regulus told him. "I'll see what I can do, but as you know, *orders are orders*."

Taking him from the bed, washing him, changing him, laying him down with his head to his chest, Harry was placed back into the bed with the sedative making him fall asleep. Harry didn't know if he was imagining it or not but a warm hand touched his head, playing with his hair.

Harry was taken from his cell, blindfolded, and put into another room.

Not understanding what was happening or why they were doing this, the doors clicked shut behind him and he sat where he was placed, unsure of what to do. They left him? Then, a soft voice spoke up "… H-*Harry*?" Then, he heard someone crawl towards him, touching his face and his blindfold. "Y-you're alive," she softly laughed, touching his cheeks.

"Gleam?" He asked, recognising the voice. She hummed.

He hugged her, immediately, sobbing. "*Oh Gleam.*"

"I know, I know." She took ahold of him, stroking his back and letting him lean against her body. They did nothing but hug and when Harry felt exhausted, she still held him, telling him it was okay to. Sleeping on the floor, he felt more protected than he had in a long time. More alive than he ever had been, he thinks.

Until, that blessed action had its consequence.

Harry heard Gleam's screams and Gleam heard his. The two were being tortured together, on what Harry felt like opposite sides of the room, as he was held, touched, and drowned. The electric shocks were the worst, but so was the memories of ***Him***. He would kiss him and tell him to die. Hold him and tell him to fall. Love him and wish death upon him—he didn't save him. He wouldn't ever. Tom abandoned him. He shook with tears following down his face, the torturers sending electric shocks through his body.

"Do you really think she'll protect you?"

"She's quite weak, Harry, weaker than you."

"Although, you're so weak — you can't stand up to anyone. You let bad things happen."

"I almost like when they touch you like this. It makes you less of mine, this way."

"Like your everyone's, and nobody loves you. Only for your body and its uses."

"Such a slave, I think I could chain you up forever, and you'd accept it."

Harry sobs.

He didn't know how much time had passed but when it did the pain still lingered. Regulus returned, he always did; Gleam watching and moving to immediately get ready to protect him. He whimpered, Regulus telling Harry it was okay - that he was there. Although, he told Gleam to calm down. "I've been looking after Harry this entire time, Gleam. I promise you - you can watch me take care of him if you really want but I'm efficient."

"Leave," she growled. "Leave us alone!"

"*Regulus…*"

Regulus said nothing about her comment, picking him up and taking him to the bathroom. Harry thought it must've be attached to her cell. He shook in his arms, Regulus taking the blindfold off. The man helped him to go the bathroom before assisting him with bathing.

Gleam watched, Harry seeing her face for the first time. She was hideous and nothing like the woman who Harry first met. Her cheeks were cut-deep nearly to the bone with how starved she was, sickly pale. Her eyes were dead, lifeless as she stared at him, observing him. All her beautiful golden hair was gone, Gleam touching his own hair. The curls fried at the ends. Regulus observed the damage. “I’ll make sure to talk to them about this.”

Gleam snapping to him. “How dare you condone this?”

Regulus shrugs his shoulders. “It’s my duty to take care of him.”

“What?” She faltered. “Why is there a duty for—“

“Special occasions,” he tells her as if that explains everything.

The woman was small, all the muscle she had when they first met was gone, her lips were cracked and her body was shaking from the cold. She studied Regulus as he washed him, Harry leaning into the touch like a touch-starved puppy. He shivered, Regulus touching his throat where the collar laid. It was bruised, he felt. Although, he didn’t say anything about it, Harry knew Regulus was observing all the points where he was harmed.

Then, after he was done, he opened another yogurt packet and began to spoon-feed him. Gleam watched the interaction, Regulus handing her a yogurt and spoon. Harry accepts the mouthfuls, swallowing them at his own pace. Nobody says anything, what would they? After he was done, the blindfold went on and Regulus wrapped him with a towel before clothing him. Regulus picked him up and took him back over to the bed. He heard his words being directed to Gleam. “Are you doing to have a bath yourself or should I help you?”

“I can bathe myself, asshole.”

“I can make your life harder for you, I think you’d like to pick yours words carefully.”

Harry shivered at his tone.

Regulus left. Gleam showered. She got back into bed with him after she changed, wrapping her arms around his body, Harry relaxing into them. The words of **Tom** rung at the back of his head. *Don’t trust her to protect you. She’s weak. You’re weak and won’t be able to salvage any sort of justice for her if you do something out of line. One day, you’ll die, and that day is soon. Your parents will die. You will die. I will die because of*

you. He shook with the nightmares, waking up screaming, and thrashing around—Gleam telling him it was okay and murmuring comforting words to him.

He didn't believe her.

They kept touching him.

Sucking on the skin of his body, every piece *they* could get to, he felt like his body was being consumed by *them*. Murmuring words like he was born for this, that he was made for this, that this was their revenge for all the times Harry had hurt them; he was being torn into. Hands touched him down there, palming at him, Harry unable to do anything about it. Whispers of names—other than pet-names the tortures called him. Real life, human names from the Capitol of people they really wanted to get with. He was their placeholder, their toy, their **mutt**.

Regulus kept returning, feeding him, bathing him, helping him; but he wasn't enough.

Neither was Gleam, with her hugs, her murmurs of reassurement, her pleasurable words.

Harry stopped crying, stopped feeling.

He laid there, not screaming, not fighting, broken.

To the point when even they had to stopped what they were doing to check on him, to make sure he wasn't dead. *"Harry, Harry, Harry—is he alive?"*

"You better fucking hope so."

"Kid…"

Everything went dark.

Not blindfolded, tucked underneath a warm doona, head on a fluffy pillow—his eyes opened to find himself in the first room they had him in. With his arm attached to an IV, a heart monitor telling them that he was alive, Harry wished he wasn't. Regulus' footsteps entered the room and hurried over to him. Looking up to find a blurred blob in

front of him, the man began. “Dumbledore had them extracted from your schedule,” Regulus tells him. “Additionally, nobody realised you had an iron deficiency until you passed out needing an emergency dose.”

He didn’t speak.

Regulus kept. “For now, nobody is going to touch you whilst you're in here except for me. Dumbledore says that he can’t afford anymore people to get handsy with you, the last lot too much for his tastes. That if he really wanted you to be scarred like that, he would’ve sold you a long time ago.” The man touches his curls, Harry unmoving. “Your diet has changed as well.”

“No—no more yogurt?”

“No more yogurt,” Regulus agrees, somewhat happy for him. “Although, I still have to feed you.”

“That’s okay…”

So long as he never has yogurt again.

———

They stopped torturing him.

Harry guessed Dumbledore got what he wanted from him. Entirely submissive; broken Harry. But so long as he never had to endure what he had again, he would be okay with that. He didn’t care anymore for what they could do to him. He wanted to die. *Wanted to murder **Tom**. **Tom** wouldn’t stop speaking to him in his dreams, nightmares, throughout the day when he thought about his low meaningless opinions about others, and things. Always had to say something. Harry wasn’t able to get him to shut up—to leave him alone.* Regulus took care of him.

Fed iron tablets five times a day, distributed so he would be able to adjust to the doses given to him, it was to heighten his levels. Surprisingly, one day, Regulus brought back a red fluffy bear with him —placing it on the bed next to Harry. The teenager observed it, unsure of what to say. “Your birthday was a couple of week ago when you were unconscious, I felt like getting you something to commemorate it. Eighteen, right?”

“Eighteen in fuckin’ hell.” He says, touching the buttons of the bear’s eyes.

“Well, still—I thought something colourful would comfort you somewhat.”

“Red? Like blood.”

Regulus shrugged his shoulders. “I heard your father’s favourite colour was red.”

He tilted his head at that information. “Red?—why?”

“Your mother’s hair, I think.”

Touching the stuffy, Harry accepted the gift, holding it close to his chest. Regulus smiled at the action before passing him his iron tablet. Harry swallowed it before closing his eyes again. He slept with the stuffed bear, close to his heart as if to protect it. To protect himself and his body. ***Tom returned.*** *Are you so much of a baby that you need a stuffed-animal to comfort you? As much as I like to torment you, it’s quite stupid, the gift.* Harry grew angry at the voice. This Tom didn’t understand what this meant to him. He wasn’t experiencing this — he wouldn’t know what an inch of kindness could do to a person. *They’re manipulating you.* Harry fucking knows that! He knows that and he doesn’t care; he’s not there. Tom’s not there.

He sobbed, unable to help himself.

Harry felt like he was falling from another building, unable to save himself.

This fucking bear has been the only good thing he’s received in weeks.

Can’t he fucking have this?

Chapter End Notes

omg, I actually went through and edited this chapter personally and I forgot how sad I made it
... :(
AHHHHHHHHHHHHHH

P S

Is It Over Now? & Guilty As Sin?

Chapter Summary

Harry meets a girl...
She happens to have quite the few familiarities to him.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Harry held the bear within his reach at all times, even when Regulus bathed him. He would wash his hair and Harry kept staring at the bear whilst it was on the floor beside Regulus. Appearing to notice his affection for the bear, Regulus didn't say anything demeaning about it - only allowing him to be childish with it. The meals he received were large, Harry unable to eat it all. Still, a few days later he wasn't able to make a dint on the various meals they were feeding to him. His body was probably use to the fucking yogurt after all this time.

Then, Dumbledore arrived one day without Regulus in sight. "Hello, Harry."

His face wasn't turned to him, nor was he turned to him when he walked in. Harry didn't answer back. Dumbledore walked to the spot where Regulus always did when he wanted to talk to him. The elderly man observed him looking up, tilting his head - glancing down at his bear in his hands. Then, he looked up to his face. "I've got someone to introduce to you."

At the remark, he shook his head - panicked, "no—no-no-no, I'm okay —thank you—"

"It's not Gleam or Ceres," Dumbledore tells him. "It's not even your mother or father."

Harry shook, still nervous, still confused.

"Come, that's why I wanted to introduce you."

Slowly, he got up from the bed. Immediately, his vision spark black and he felt like he was going to collapse when he held onto the bed until he could see clearly again. Well—not clearly, they took his vision from him a while ago so it's only blurred still, but now it wasn't black. Dumbledore handed him a pair of glasses, Harry taking them. As the

man walked two steps in front of him, he kept checking behind him to make sure Harry was still following. It was like he stopped purposefully, he found it hard to walk after so many days of being carried to and from places. Crawling if he had to go somewhere. He brought his bear with him for comfort. “What have you named the bear?” Dumbledore asked.

He shrugged his shoulders. “I haven’t.”

“Really?” He tilted his head towards the left. “Have you thought about naming it?”

“It’s a girl,” Harry huffed, knitting his eyebrows together. “No, I haven’t.”

Dumbledore appears perplexed, as if that’s not how he wanted the conversation to go. Harry nervously thought he failed some kind of test. Still, he said nothing about his surprise — gesturing to this room. Dumbledore explains the rules because there are, of course, rules for this room in particular. “If you get too overwhelmed, we’ll come and retrieve you, but we’re going to try and make sure you’re okay regardless. The girl inside might be a little snappy and stubborn whilst talking to her, try not to aggravate her. She’s like you, in a way that you might understand.”

Harry tilted his head, “what’s her name?”

“Why don’t you ask her that yourself?”

Dumbledore opened the door and Harry walked into the apartment-like building perplexed. In one room around the entrance, there was an open bathroom which was double the size of his own — all pastel pink and purple, with white tiles. There was one toothbrush that was green and the toothpaste was on the other side of the sink. There were plants hanging from everywhere, with a matt that said “Good Days.” He left the bathroom, not finding this girl he was supposed to meet. The next room was like a laundry room and the next room, semi-connected to the laundry, was a walk in-wardrobe. There were heaps of clothes—of all fashions inside of the room. Exiting, he found the living room connected with the hallway, that had a kitchen right behind the bathroom.

It was all aesthetically pleasing to the eye, all the kitchenettes sparkling with colour and cleanliness. The couch was a dark tree and lining across the back of the couch was a bookshelf Hermione would’ve loved to have in her bedroom growing up. On the couch was

a teenage girl, with curly, dark black hair, dark brown skin like Harry, and was untouched to the torture Dumbledore inflicted onto him. She was reading a book with headphones connected to a phone she had. The girl also had a laptop, television—everything.

He wondered who she was.

The girl noticed movement and looked up at him. Her eyes were hazelnut, a light brown unlike his green ones. She took one of the earbuds from her ears. “Hello,” she began. “Who are you?”

“Who am I?” Harry pursed his lips, “why aren’t you more afraid?”

“You’re holding a teddy bear—“ the girl said, “you don’t look like someone I have to be afraid of.”

“I’m Harry James Potter.”

“Really?” The girl tilted her head, interestedly. “My name is Cavernity Lily Potter.”

Harry grew silent, eyeing the girl before him. This—this was his sister? She appeared to connect the dots as well, patting the couch gesturing for him to sit down next to her. He shook, knitting his eyes shut as he tried to digest this information. For years, he’s had a baby sister and he hasn’t known of her. A hand touches his, Harry’s eyes opening wide. “Harry, come sit with me on the couch. It’s okay, they aren’t going to hurt us.” Using her hand to guide him beside her, she brings the blanket at her feet to his so they were sharing the wool.

She kept one hand on his, placing with it as if observing who he was. Cavernity touched his cheek, Harry realising she must be observing the scar he received back in his first Hunger Games. “I wasn’t allowed to watch the Hunger Games last year or this year, but I can imagine what happened. You were in the Games last year and Dumbledore didn’t want me to see so he didn’t show me, the same with the 3rd Quarter Quell because of the contents of the Games. Where have you been, Harry?”

“L—lots of places,” he answers truthfully. “I’ve been in the Capitol, 12.”

“You were 12’s victor,” she chimed, nodding her head. “Cool.”

“How old are—are you?”

She shrugs her shoulders as if that's the least important of information he could've asked for. "I was born on December 7th, I think, and I'm turning seventeen." He nods his head and tells her how he's eighteen, just-turned. Cavernity glances down at his bear before touching his face and jaw, touching the small braid that was in his hair. "You look a lot younger than eighteen, Harry, although you do look as if you're past being an adult — if that makes any sense." He can understand and she scratches his hair gently. "What type of shampoo and conditioner are they using on your hair? It's quite hideous."

He doesn't know how to answer her. "I don't know."

Cavernity stands up, "come—I'll wash your hair with good products for our hair."

They head to the bathroom together and he leaves his head over the bathtub as she rubs shampoos and conditioners through his hair, washing it with the movable shower-head. He lets her take care of him like this as he holds his bear. Cavernity does say much until his hair was all wet but silky from the products. "Have you met our parents?"

"If they were at gunpoint where to meet them, then 'suppose."

"I haven't. I've only got one photo of them that I've looked after. Wanna see it?"

She takes him back to the living room and grabs a frame on the bookshelves behind the couch. Handing him the frame, he looks at the photo in awe. "They're somewhere in the Districts, I think, which I always thought was weird but considering I've always been in this room — I guessed they did something bad and I was a product of whatever mishap happened and they couldn't let me free." Harry asked if she had an education. "Online, yes, back when I was younger, I had a maid taking care of me until I was nine. Then, I've been entirely alone until now."

"No one has come to visit you?" Harry asked, mortified.

"No, even Dumbledore likes to keep his distance from me. Torment, I reckon."

Harry hugs Cavernity without asking to, she accepts the hug but feels weird trying to reciprocate it. His sister pulls back after a minute, holding his face and he allows it. She murmurs, "you look so exhausted. Would you like to sleep on my bed?" Bringing his bear

with him, behind her television was a king sized bed that was like in a different part of the house. Cavernity brings her book and sits on the bed, Harry crawling in after her. Laying on her back, she lets him lean his body next to her as she stroked his hair. “I didn’t know I had a brother,” she tells him, “but I don’t think I’d mind if it was you.”

He accepts the word she says and falls asleep, the mattress warming his body. She read her book as Harry relaxed on his side. He thrashed and turned, heart racing as he tried to breathe. Someone touched his shoulders and body, trying to get him to wake up. When he did, tears were streaming down his face and he wasn’t able to breathe. “Uhm, shhh it’s alright Harry. Nobody is here, nobody is going to touch you apart from me — and I won’t touch you without your permission, m’kay?”

She leans down, hugging him and he cries into her collarbone as she strokes his back. Cavernity wasn’t a dream, then. She asks if he thinks he can stand, but honestly, his body feels like jelly. Wobbly, unstable, and frighteningly weak. As if she could understand from his facial expressions, she picked him up and brought him over to the island table where she placed him on one of the chairs there. He held his bear close to him, Harry watching as she made dinner of sorts.

“You don’t have any allergies that you’re aware of?” He shakes his head. “Alright, just tell me how this tastes and if I need to add something else to make it taste better. I’ve never had a guest before so usually I just eat whatever I can make. So…”

“I—I’m sure it will—will be good, Ca-Caver-Cavernity.”

“Yeah,” she smiles softly, “Cavernity. It’s a bit of a mouthful.”

“A Capitol name?”

His sister shrugs as if she doesn’t know herself. “I’m not sure, all I know is that they told me our parents wanted me to be called something with a C so I got the name Cavernity. Yours must be a District one, nobody is called Harry here.” She plates him pasta, handing him a knife and fork. Harry thanks his sister. Grabbing herself a bowl, she grabs herself only a fork as she puts salt and pepper on hers. “Do you like to read?”

He gulps the pasta she gave him, “I’m not an avid reader but I can read when I like.”

She nods her head, intrigued. “What type of genre do you like?”

“I like anything but horror and thriller, I think,” he tells her.

“Fair enough. What about an easy romance to read?”

“What is it about?”

“Ah, I think you’ll like this one.”

She heads over to her book shelves and grabs out five books instead of the ‘one’ she said he was going to like. Placing them onto the counter, his bear on his lap, she began to explain the plot to all of the books. “Depending on what type of romance pairing you like to read, these have them all—I think. A straight couple, a gay couple, a lesbian couple, a polymerous group, and an asexual couple.” At half of those terms, he raised his eyebrows at. She noticed and explained the terms. “Straight, a boy and girl. Gay, two boys. Lesbian, two girls. A polymerous group is three or more people in a relationship - not cheating, and I find people write them badly but this book is good. And asexual is a branch of multitude of things. Asexual realistically means you aren’t attracted to the act of sex in itself, but can be in a romance with another. Aromatic is similar, but the opposite. Where you like sex but can’t engage in a romance.”

“Those are a lot of words. I’m bisexual.”

“You know what that is?”

He doesn’t know what to say but the truth. “I asked Hermione, my best friend, the terminology for liking girls and boys, and she gave me that - but I haven’t ever cared all that much about who I am like. All I know is that I couldn’t care about a person’s gender.”

Cavernity appeared curious at that information. “Maybe you’re demisexual?”

“What’s that mean?”

“It means when you’re attracted to someone after you’ve created a close bond to that person.” His sister grabs a hair-tie from her wrist and puts her hair up into a ponytail whilst he thinks about her statement. “You might not, but if you’ve ever liked someone a lot — and you’ve got a strong connection to them, then it’s ringing some bells you might be demisexual.”

He tilts his head, perplexed. “Well, I’m engaged so…?”

Cavernity nods her head at him, as if not surprised. “Yeah, demisexual. Sometimes trauma can bond people greater than what attraction could. So… who are they?” She asked, her cheeks full of interest and wonder. Harry flushed before he thought of Tom. He gulped, nervously eating his pasta to avoid talking about him. Tom—Tom, what could he say about him besides the fact he keeps torturing him in his dreams? His sister appears perplexed by his emotions.

“They… they don’t abuse you do they?”

He shrugs his shoulders. “I don’t know.”

“What’s their name?”

Tom.

He cries into his food, not sure what he was supposed to remember of his man. Cavernity rubs his back comfortingly, Harry tries to explain the situation. “I—I can’t remember anything about him but pain. Those torturers—the Capitol people kept repeating his name in my head, kept putting memories into my head of him. False memories. He’s good. Tom’s good. But I can’t remember anything about it but the pain they’ve caused me.” She sharply inhales, getting up slowly from her seat and wrapping her arms around him.

“It’s alright, Harry, I’ll take your word for it.”

She begins to lead him back to bed with assistance. “Tom…” she murmurs, trying to think about where she recognised the name from, “this Tom isn’t Tom Riddle is it?” He doesn’t reject the comment, leading his head up against her pillow, holding his bear tightly. Cavernity appears surprised, horrified almost, shaking her head—knowingly. “Harry…”

“He’s—he’s good, Cavernity.”

“I know,” she agrees, “I know. I’ve seen what good he’s done.”

His sister asks him, “can I show you in the morning?”

Agreeing, somewhat, she plays with his hair before he passes out.

———

In the morning, Cavernity makes him pancakes, the two eating them together on the couch. Turning on the television, she begins to scroll

through the different channels before she lands on the ones she rerecorded. Pressing on the recordings, she pauses the channel before he can watch anything. “These are of Tom—and your friends, I’m guessing, if anything becomes too much—tell me. I’ll stop them.”

His eyes were eager to see what had happened since he’s been captured, the first panel of the camera being shot in front of the Justice Building in District 12 — he recognised Nathaniel. The entire hour they had shot for, overwhelmed him until it got to Tom’s part. His hair had grown out since he last saw him, however, long ago but he had two wedding bands flowing from his neck. Cavernity observed the rings, “he has your ring?”

“We had two incase I lost mine,” Harry admitted, “the Capitol took mine from me.”

“Then, he’s protecting yours with his own.”

His sister smiles, Harry noticing Tom was on the pier they jumped off into one morning. He cried, trying to remember what was real and what wasn’t, but Tom had emotions connected to the pier and spoke about it. He figured it must be real, that Tom wouldn’t be stupid to make it up. His voice began to speak, “I fell in-love with Harry Potter before the Games. Before I knew what love was. Harry was born here and by his birthright it’s his. District 12. The freedom of the District. People like to predict where I came from, but I grew up in an orphanage. So did Harry. If you can imagine, we’re both Capitol-kids. That until we both divided into two completely different paths from where we first met. Best friends, in the bowels of the Capitol.”

“District 12 is gone…” he murmurs, knowing that from the previous videos of Nathaniel, Hermione, and Ron but he was telling the camera that this—wasn’t gone. He cried throughout the video, Cavernity rubbing his back comfortingly.

When the video ended, she whispered into his ear. “I think that Tom loves you, Harry.”

He told her, “he’s the one who proposed.”

Cavernity nodded her head at him before wrapping her arms around him, Harry leaning into her hug, resting his head on her shoulder. She appeared joyous to him, “congratulations - I better be invited to the wedding.” He softly smiles at the comment, thinking about what it would be like to marry Tom. He’d be his husband, Tom would be his own; there would be flower kids; they would be able to have fun and

dance after the entire vows shit was over. Drink, have fun. He wiped his eyes, tears flowing down his cheeks. He wondered if Cavernity would be there. Or Mum—or Dad. They'd love it, he thinks.

"I think I'd like to be married," he tells her.

"Well, you've got a fighter." Cavernity whispers, "it doesn't look like he's given up on you."

He flushes, his sister touching the scar on his cheek. "I don't think he ever will - which is why I'm going to give our parents blessings in honour for you. He seems like a good person, but I'll have to make sure of that myself in-person, okay?" She kissed his forehead, Harry yawning. It was long before he was asleep on her lap whilst she began to read another book of hers. With calming music playing in the background, he dreamed of what his wedding would look like.

———

He didn't have a nightmare.

When he woke up, Cavernity made more pancakes for them; handing him a notebook to distract himself with since he told her that he was a good lyrical writer. He distracted himself, writing various lyrics and tunes, beats to keep himself entertained. When Cavernity asked what he had written after sometime, he told her the paragraph he created. "Occasionally, I like to walk - Favourably, I like to talk - Behaviourally, I like to stalk - Cavernity, I like to gawk." Harry smiled brightly, Cavernity rolling her eyes at the rhyme.

"I thought you said you were good?"

"Oh shut up," Harry pouted, "I thought I would write something simple for you."

"What else did you write?"

She takes the notebook from him, reading what he had actually written.

My sister is the biggest prize,
She likes books and likes the sky,
Never tells me no, always says to fly,
She is quite wise—
And likes all my guys

Cavernity laughed, pointing at the lyrics. “Okay, these are better.”

The two kept writing and discussing various lyrics they could write, ending up back on the couch after they finished their food. Harry had never had someone who liked writing lyrics besides Cavernity before, he doesn’t think. Apparently, she couldn’t sing but her talents for writing were impeccable so they kept going over various rhymes and poems. Even funny ones. “Dear Mrs. Parker, do you have a partner? ‘Cause I’m an archer and you’re an arrow, and I always aim for the mark-er.” The two laugh at the rhyme, going back and forth, having fun.

Then, the click of the door opens, the two siblings freezing.

Harry turns to Cavernity, “so you don’t ever get visitors?”

“Never.”

Gulping, they wait for the person to make themselves known to the room. Regulus appears from the hallway, leaning his arm against the wall, looking at the two of them. Harry instinctively knows he’s there to get Harry and return him back to his room. “Harry,” he nods his head, “Cavernity. My name is Regulus Black. I’m here to collect Harry.” Cavernity turns to him, his eyes on the couch. Regulus appears indifferent to Cavernity’s presence. “Dumbledore’s orders.”

Cavernity speaks up, “will I ever get to see Harry again?”

Regulus shrugs his shoulders. “Time will tell.”

She wraps both hands around Harry, kissing his forehead before whispering. “You will have your wedding someday and I’ll be there to see it, okay?” She kisses his scarred cheek, Harry trying not to cry for the both of them. “Be brave, Harry, and know that your Tom seems like a good guy. If you can’t believe yourself, you can believe me—alright?” She pressed both her hands to his cheeks before Regulus came over to help him up.

Before he left, Cavernity took off her necklace and wrapped it around his neck.

The golden necklace was hidden underneath his clothes, Cavernity avoiding touching his collar.

Regulus said nothing about the gift, assisting him with getting up, holding his bear for him. Harry frowned, leaning up against Regulus

as they walked out of the apartment, Harry giving his sister one last wave goodbye before he was returned back to his room. Regulus explained why Dumbledore had ordered him out. “Cavernity wasn’t feeding you anything with iron in it so we’re going to have to give you more doses. Additionally, Dumbledore has another job for you.”

“What?” Harry tilted his head.

“You’re going to have to calm one of the prisoners down.”

“Do… do I know them?”

Regulus shook his head. “He’s from District 3 — and he’s been quite vicious for the past few days. We’re thinking if he sees you, he’ll calm down but at the moment he’s all tense and murderous but it means the blindfold goes back on.” Harry asks when he’ll see him. Regulus says, “after you eat. I recommend you try to eat everything you can, it’s going to be a long night trying to calm him down.” Harry was curious about this prisoner, Regulus telling him a few more details about him. That he was originally apart of the team of people who put up the technological systems within the Capitol and that he was a traitor, erasing and fucking it all up, but all he wants to do is kill anyone who comes into the room. Harry was unsure why torture hadn’t worked but Regulus said they needed him because his genius was valuable to them, and that anything to try and fry his brain wasn’t worth it. All his mission really was - was to calm him down because nobody could talk to him without the man thrashing out. After he ate, he was bathed before dressed in silk pyjamas.

His hair growing longer, Regulus put what he could up into a ponytail so it was out of his face before he placed the blindfold onto his face. The man carrying him on his back to the cells, it didn’t take long before he was placed and stabilised on the ground, told that inside was a man called Kilo Syntax. Listening to Regulus’ voice, he pressed a button and said, “Kilo—I have a special guest for you to meet. I don’t recommend that you attack him. He’s quite startled to meet you but you’ll be good for him, okay?”

Regulus pressing a hand to Harry’s face. “Don’t worry about him trying to attack you, once he realises who you are—he’ll calm down. The man doesn’t have any family and everyone has seen enough propaganda about you to know how valuable you are.” Harry held his bear, nervous. “All we want is for him to be pliant, this little shit has been scratching and hurting everyone.”

“M’kay, just look after me, alright.”

“Of course,” Regulus tells him.

Opening the door, Regulus directs him to be inside of the room. Once the door shut behind him, Harry used the wall to stay standing up, not sure how far he was leaning on either side, trying not to fall over. He nervously stood there, unsure of what to say. “Harry?” A voice began, almost shocked and angry—Harry hummed in response.

He was surprised when he heard movement but Kilo was over him and brought him to the back of the room immediately. Harry was shocked and surprised, his arms over Kilo’s back whilst the adult protected him from the front. “You’re not hurt, are you?” The man hurriedly asked. Harry shrugged his shoulders, telling him he didn’t know. There were a lot of things he was conflicted about. Although, the man took that as a bad sign. “Fuck, why haven’t they retrieved you yet?”

“I should’ve killed myself when I had the chance,” Kilo tells him.

“What happened?”

He was told about what happened at District 3, where Kilo and his team were trying to destroy all of the aircrafts and he was the reason why District 13 was able to get into the system because their team opened up the glitch they created in the first place and was able to hack into it.

Harry relaxed against Kilo’s back, the adult warm. “How old are you?”

“Twenty-two.”

“I’m now eighteen.”

“Happy birthday, Harry.”

“Thank you.”

Harry wasn’t sure what Regulus was looking for but he slept up against Kilo’s body. The man appeared to be constantly on edge, stroking his hands softly as if to comfort him. It was a long time until anyone came back to Kilo’s cell, but Kilo hadn’t moved nor did Harry. Once the door opened, Harry’s eyes snapped open to the sound of Kilo hissing at the person. “Kilo,” Regulus greeted him, “I have orders to feed, Harry.”

“Who are you?” He growled at him, voice raspy with the lack of water he’s drunk.

“I’m Regulus Black, Harry’s primary carer. I need to look after him.”

“Like torture him?”

Harry whispered to Kilo, “he’s been good to me.”

Kilo whispered back, furious, “I don’t trust him, regardless.”

Regulus came closer to them. “Harry, get up. I need to feed you.”

“Not yogurt?”

“No yogurt.”

Standing up, Kilo grabbed Harry’s hand and asked him what he was doing. He shrugged his shoulders, unsure of what he was supposed to say. The young adult appeared to need guidance on what to do with the situation. “I’ll be okay, Kilo. Regulus has been good to me. I hope I’ll be back and see you again,” Kilo watched with exasperation as he left. Regulus took his hand and guided him to the door where it shut behind them. Taking off the blindfold, Harry looks up at Regulus. He asked, “what did you want me to do?”

Regulus nodded his head, content with Harry, “you did everything you had to. Come, Dumbledore wants you to meet your mother.” At the topic of his mother, his eyes widened and he took Regulus’ hand, the two walking through the hallways together.

The older man brought him to a dim room that reminded him a lot of what he’d imagine a kindergarten would’ve looked like. Harry places his bear on his lap as he takes a seat at one of the chairs. Regulus passed him a plate of food, Harry accepting it and eating. Regulus took a seat next to him, pulling out his phone and concentrating on other work he had to complete. Once he was done, Regulus took the plate and gave it back to the kitchen that must be behind the door, returning with a bowl of ice-cream.

Harry’s eyes widened when it was placed in front of him. “This is for me?”

Regulus shrugged his shoulders, “it was all that was left.”

He smiled, eating the ice-cream, not wanting the man to change his

mind about allowing him to have the sugar. He felt warm, licking the sweetness from the spoon as he dug in. Regulus continued to do his normal work on his phone, Harry trying not to bother him as he sat there. He took his time, not trying to rush himself. When he was done, Regulus took the bowl and spoon, bringing it back behind the door. After he returned, he brought Harry through a few more doors—

His eyes locked onto his mother when he was brought to her room.

Turning his head to Regulus, he asked, “Dumbledore allowed me to see her?—what’s the catch?”

“There isn’t a catch, Harry,” he ruffled his hair, “I convinced him to let you see her.”

“Really?”

“I’m not a monster, you know.”

His face blossomed into a smile before hugging Regulus. Perhaps Regulus wasn’t so bad after all; he heads in further into the room and his mother makes eye-contact with him. She’s surprised to see him. Sitting on the bed, Harry walked to the bed nervous, his bear helping him with his nerves. This was the first time he was meeting his mother for real. Her green eyes focused on him, blinking back tears. “Harry,” she whispers as if she couldn’t believe it.

He beamed, closing his eyes. “Mum.”

She touches his hair first, observing his curls before she hugs him. Like Harry, she wore a collar, and he leaned his head up against her chest, sobbing. Her touch was colder than Cevernity’s. She kept stroking his hair, whispering that she loved him, and Harry didn’t know how to act. After years without a mother, without a sister—without his father, he doesn’t know how to act—now having a family. All those times, they should’ve been there with him. He heaved, devastated.

“I know, darling, I know.” She whispered into his ear. “It’s okay.”

“M-mum,” he struggled to speak.

“You’ve got a beautiful voice, love. Just like your father’s.”

Harry laid there for ages. His mother kept comforting him, and he thinks he understands what it means—when someone says their

mother is like their pillar of support. Cevernity had similar qualities to her, he realised. She was more stupid with Harry, both of them not acting serious with one another because they were siblings and trying to work the whole thing out; but when she was serious, she had the same reasoning as their mum.

He wasn't able to go to sleep, so he murmured, "you've been stuck here for eighteen years?"

His mum sadly sighs, stroking his hair, "yes."

"Why—why go against the Capitol, mum?"

"We had a dream, Harry, and we were young." With her other hand, she rubbed circles into his back. "You must understand that naive thoughts like ours were normal for District 12, but we only returned to the Capitol for you and Cavernity, so you wouldn't have to go through the Hunger Games." She sighed, puffing. "Our efforts were for nothing, I'm sorry."

"Don't apologise," he tells her. "It was luck through which I was drawn. Don't worry about it."

She breathed as if she didn't believe him but didn't argue. He spent a long time, laying there, in her arms, never wanting to let go. His mum held him tightly, like how he imagined a mother would. Molly always used to hug him like this as if she was one of her children. He decides to tell his mother about what he's been up to that was happy in the past two years. He whispers. "I'm engaged, ma." His mum stops stroking him.

"Really?—to whom?" She appears shocked by this notion.

"Tom."

His mum doesn't know what to say to that information, but she continues to stroke him after the initial shock. "Is he a District 12 boy?" He shakes his head, telling her Capitol. His mum appeared frightened, asking how they met. He told his mother the story about how Dumbledore was trying to lure out Sirius by leaving him outside of the Black Estate, and how he thought Sirius took him back to the Districts whilst he was actually in an orphanage within the Capitol where he met Tom. Then, he left due to Tom being adopted by Dumbledore and headed to District 12 of his own accord, not knowing his parents were still alive. Then, he lived there until he was reaped.

She relaxed significantly when he told her about how Tom betrayed the Capitol for him and how he was going to save him from the arena before something happened, unable to find him, the Capitol got to him first. His mum gently asked him, “you two haven’t had sex without protection, have you?”

“It’s not as if I can get pregnant, ma.”

“No, but sexually transmitted infections are still a thing, Harry.”

Harry pouted. “Well, nothing bad has happened to either of us - least I know so…”

“Still, condoms, Harry.”

He flushed, realising his mother was mothering him—parenting him. It was weird how they immediately fell into the roles of child and mother, but he didn’t think he minded. Harry felt protected and warm in her arms, and her tone didn’t scare him in the least because he was so used to being without any sort of parent with the exception of Sirius, but seriously—he wasn’t much of a parent. Remus wasn’t either, having too many of his own issues. Molly and Arthur had their own kids to worry about, so he’s been on his own for a long time. She kissed his forehead. Harry whispers, “I saw Cavernity.”

She appeared surprised by this information, her eyebrows lifting. “Really? How was she?”

Harry told her about their time together and how they did things together like songwriting, sleeping, reading, watching some clips—amongst other things. Lily appeared comforted, a small smile dancing on her face. “I haven’t seen her since I gave birth to her,” she confided in him, “neither have I seen James until they made us sit together.”

“I’ve never seen any of you until I was kidnapped.” Harry admitted.

“Love,” his mum hugs him tighter, “you have us now.”

“Did you and dad talk?”

“Couldn’t, but I don’t think there was much to talk about—we understand each other so well.”

Regulus let him stay the night with his mother. In the morning, Harry sat on the side of the bed, fidgeting with the necklace Cavernity gave him. His mum observed the bear Regulus gave him, she appeared

somewhat devastated over something but Harry wasn't able to deduce what it was about. She touched his cheek, moving her thumb up and down on his scar. "Sweetheart, what have they been doing to you here?"

He doesn't know how to answer her. They've done a lot to him, both bad and good. It was a mixture of the two and he wasn't sure how he was supposed to answer her question. "They told me that everything Tom does that they don't like, I get punished. If he doesn't, I won't. I'm not sure what he has done or hasn't done but they've been following the rule in accordance with it." She purses her lips, glancing down at the bear.

She asks him, curious. "Do you think you need the bear, Harry?"

Harry doesn't know how to answer her.

"I want to go home, mum."

She strokes the scar, "is home with Tom?"

Harry was still conflicted with his feelings with Tom through the memories they injected into his mind of what he was, what he could be, he was scared, but tried to remember Cavernity said that if she trusted him—Harry could. She was his guidance until he was able to tell for himself. His mum held his cheek, pressing her lips to his forehead. Harry didn't know what was up with so many people touching him, but he didn't say anything against her doing so. "I think so, mum. I—they torture me if I'm not good, I think she helps me," talking about the bear.

"Good, if she helps you, that's good, Harry."

He smiled at her reassurance.

His mother began to tell Harry about when she first met his father and he listened to everything she had to tell him. How they met when Lily went to school in District 2 and naturally was in his father's social bubble, and how James was attracted to his mother—and soon enough, they were together and planning their journey to explore the world. Then, they met Sirius, went to District 12 and would sing, dance, party with the Marauders which Harry told his mum that he continued. Alice and Frank helped him revive the bar. She said she was proud of him.

When Regulus returned, the man appeared exhausted.

Helping Harry from his mum's bed, Harry waved his mother a goodbye before Regulus took him back to his room. He asked what was wrong, since he appeared disheveled and Regulus told Harry about how Kilo was being uncooperative and his words 'a little shit.' Handing him another meal with his tablets, he ate and drank water, before Regulus bathed him. His bear came along with it. "What did your parents think when Sirius left for the first time?"

Regulus appeared taken aback at the question before groaning, "they were obnoxious and victimising themselves - acting as if nothing about their behaviour shaped the way Sirius thought about the world. Then, I was born and they were going to try their hardest not to fuck up with me." He washed his hair. "Despite this, I've never been the favourite."

"Did you leave them?" Harry asked, "in your own way?"

"Perhaps," Regulus debates.

He dried him before clothing him. Regulus spoke about another thing he would have to do in the upcoming days. "Dumbledore is getting more agitated because there are a lot of uprisings and rebelling Districts so you're most likely going to be asked to do another speech soon in regards to it. Until then," he sighs, "I can't do much to help you."

"He wants me tortured, then?"

"Somewhat—wants Tom to become a mess. I apologise."

Harry hugs Regulus, accepting his apology—Regulus softly hugged back, Harry knowing this was out of his line for his duty but the man nonetheless comforted by the fact he knew there wasn't anything he could do about it. Leaving him in the room, the nightmare began.

Tom was back.

A different group of torturers kept interjecting Tom into his brain and he kept watching as Tom hurt him. Would strangle him and hold him off the side of the Tribute's Centre. Would stab him hundreds of times, ignoring his screams as he tried to endure the pain. Would drown him in buckets of water, not letting his nape go when he tried to scratch him from him. It hurt. Tom hurt. He pleaded with him; ran from him whenever he could; tripped and fell, getting double the pain returned to him. The names he could call him, mutt-boy-monster-unloveable beast—

Everything about him hurt and he was left unable to move once they left; once he was gone.

He sobbed, curling onto his side.

Why did they have to do this to him?—he didn't have anything to offer—he was weak and stupid and young and meaningless, he couldn't change this war if he tried. Tom didn't love him. Nobody did. His mother was pretending for his sake. So was Cavernity. She didn't know him, how could she possibly love him after a few days of being together? Dumbledore was going to kill them when he realised there was nothing more to offer from him.

Regulus entered the room, his footsteps Harry's only tell that it was him. "Harry," he began - almost pleadingly, "get up."

"Get—get away from me, you don't want me—I'm useless—I have nothing to offer—"

"Harry," Regulus grabs him by his sides and picks him up as if he was weightless, passing him back his bear. "You're okay; you're not useless. It's alright," he tries to console him but Harry doesn't believe it, shaking his head rapidly, Regulus taking him back to the bathroom where he began to wash him. Harry shook in the water, not wanting to think about being drowned. He hiccuped, trying to get away from it. "Hey," Harry landed on Regulus' chest as he tried to escape, "it's alright. Nobody is going to harm you."

"You're lying—you're lying—they're going to come back for me—me tomorrow. You lie! You fuckin' lie—get away from me—" Regulus lifts him back into the bath and washes him regardless of his outburst, and chances to escape. Once he was done, Regulus dried him with little luck, Harry glaring and growling at him, trying to hide.

Regulus sighed, holding a hand to his head. "Harry. I'm not going to hurt you."

"Fuck off!"

A vein was prominent in Regulus' forehead as he knitted his eyebrows together. Sighing, exhaling hard, he gulped. The man is trying to work out how to deal with this. Then, he shut the door behind him. It wasn't long before Regulus was able to pin him down, Harry weak due to his lack of iron, sleep, and torture. He cried as he patted him down before changing him into his pyjamas. Regulus told him. "I got this job for a reason, Harry, I'm not going to be fired because you're

stubborn. Although, to be honest with you—I thought you were going to be a lot worse when I first met you."

Regulus picks him and his bear up, placing them both onto the bed. "Sleep, you earned it."

Harry was going to murder everyone inside of the prison, then himself.

He wanted to die.

He didn't want to see Tom anymore.

Chapter End Notes

. Sorry. For this and not posting recently. I moved schools and life is great! No ao3 curse besides seeing my mum today erkkkkk.

Actually SOTR is ao3 curse enough
Now I think thoughts of propaganda r going to kill me with this fic
AHHHHH I FORGOT I WROTE THIS >;;;;;;C AO3 CURSE HAS HIT ME :(

P S

Vigilante Shit & Say Don't Go

Chapter Summary

Tom sings.

Chapter Notes

I don't know how I did it but two chapters in two days. It's your lucky day. Don't expect this again for awhile.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Tom didn’t know what to do, sitting on his bed inside of his living quarters, head up against Nathaniel’s shoulder, everyone in the Weasley family, the Croseph family, and the rest of the stranglers they picked up along the way inside—discussing what they should do. Harry could be dead, he thinks to himself. If that song was anything to go on from, he might be beyond tortured. He avoided looking at any of them, not wanting to speak to any of them. Nathaniel got the message and spoke to the others for him.

Fred and George sat beside Tom, the two speaking to his older brothers about what the best course of action was to take from there. “They have to get Harry out of there,” George says. Fred goes on further, “there’s no point leaving him there.” Tom frowns, not knowing what to do. Glancing down at his schedule, he groaned when a meeting popped up.

7.30 Meeting F4.R5

Nathaniel asked how many others got the message notice, and nearly half of them did. Standing up, helping Tom up - they were going to head down. Tom wasn’t optimistic, fiddling with their rings. He wanted to do things, he wanted to save Harry but nothing was moving forward. Nathaniel led the group downstairs.

When they got to the room, Tom took a seat—Nathaniel picking the seat next to him. Tom’s eyes were staring at Grindelwald, Lynx, and Circe wondering why they hadn’t done anything to save Harry yet. He fiddled with their rings. Esteven, Kingsley, Sirius, Amelia, and Remus were all there; the group spoke about what the meeting was about. “Harry Potter,” Grindelwald began, speaking to the room, “is one mission away from our goal.”

“Word from my friends in District 3 has told us that District 5 is about to take the hydroelectric dam, but morale is low.” Esteven says to the group. “After the hydroelectric dam is down, I’ll be able to put noise into the system and—“

“It will be the perfect moment to get Harry out,” Tom says without thinking.

“Precisely,” Grindelwald agrees. “But first—morale.”

Nathaniel is quick. “What about a song?”

“What type of song?” Lynx questions him.

“One of Harry’s.”

Grindelwald folds his hands together, telling him to proceed. Tom turns to Nathaniel as he explains, “Harry created a song almost three —four years ago called All for the Games. None of us have his lyrical ability but if we’re able to modify the song to emphasise what he was trying to mean, I think morale in District 5 will shoot up.” Tom nodded his head, agreeing with the idea. Grindelwald asks who was going to sing the song. “I was thinking Tom should.”

Tom choked at the comment, “me?”

Nathaniel asks him who else would be good enough to do it—and that if anyone would be able to sing one of Harry’s songs, it would be him. Tom grows nervous, not sure if he would be capable of doing it. When he was younger with Narcissa, Bella, Lucius, Mathis and the rest of the Knights of Walpurgis they did karaoke nights where he sang like the rest of them, but Tom—in no way—has a comparable voice like his fiancé. “Think about it like this. The song doesn’t have to go exactly how Harry sings it; we’re mortifying it so anyone can sing it. All we need is someone with the strongest connection to him to sing it. That person would be you.”

“All for the Games…” Hermione murmurs. “Neville would have a copy of the lyrics.”

“Go get the lyrics, Soldier Granger.” Lynx tells her.

Surprised at the order, she nods her head and agrees, leaving to go retrieve the lyrics. Tom sat there, unsure of what to do. Singing his song would be the best option to do in this predicament but the more Tom fought, the worse it was going to be for Harry. He bit his bottom

lip. Nathaniel tells him, “morale—Tom. This is the last thing we need to do before we rescue him. Afterwards, he’s home. Here, with you.”

Tom’s eyes spark with tears, conflicted. Nathaniel doesn’t stop. “All we need is for the dam to collapse and then, most of the energy will disappear, and it will be the perfect, safest moment for us to go get him.”

“We’re sparking a suicide mission,” he knits his eyebrows together.

“Tom,” Circe says, glaring at him, “stop being selfish—we’ve done so much for you and your beloved. This is the moment where we get him back for you. Those people have made their choice, they are dying in the name for this cause. For the Second Rebellion; for the chance for Dumbledore’s reign to end. It’s not all about you, but we’re doing this because you’re both valuable assets as one another. So, suck it up, rewrite the song, sing it; we’ll clip together pieces of other footage we’ve collected—we’ll send it out, and this whole battle will be won.”

“You—“ Nathaniel grabs Tom’s arm, squeezing, when he was about to yell at her.

“Don’t,” he told him. “Yes, Soldier. We will. May we be excused?”

Circe accepts the request, Nathaniel dragging Tom out with him. Once the door shut behind them, Tom yelled at him. “What was that for?” Nathaniel pushed his chest away from him, gritting his teeth. “Tom, you were about to fuck it up for all of us. I get you like to have your way and say the last word, but those people aren’t people you fuck with. Those children are extensions of their father, Grindelwald. It’s like how you were an extension of Dumbledore so nobody fucked with you.” Nathaniel pointed a finger at his face, Tom freezing at the statement, “Harry’s life is on the line. We’re almost there—they’re doing this so you’re more useful, you realise.”

Tom gulped, not realising all of these things Nathaniel was telling him. “They don’t care about Harry’s life. They care about yours because out of the two of you; who brings the most damage? The betrayer of the Capitol; the President’s ex-successor; the Capitol’s Prince—or the Angel of Death; the Boy-Who-Lived? You are destruction, to them.” Nathaniel tells Tom, “but you’re weak because Harry is in the Capitol and you can’t do anything to stop them from hurting him.”

“They don’t want you to be weak so they’re going to rescue him. Unfortunately, they don’t know what to expect when they rescue

Harry. He's been tortured, Tom." Nathaniel states plainly, his eyes tight with emotions. "There's obviously a reason why they haven't rescued him since the Games. It's not because of wanting to save him; it's not because they could care; it's because they wanted to see how useful you were without him."

Tom yells at him, "what makes you think that?"

"Because you're the Capitol's Commander; the Rebel Leader of the Capitol. They didn't know you up until the Games. They also didn't know whether or not you were going to betray them. They wanted leverage against you, Tom." Nathaniel has both his hands pulling at his hair, the teenager pissed. "Nearly nineteen and the ex-successor of Panem's President, what else did you think was going to happen?"

"This wasn't my fault, I wanted to save him!"

"I fucking know it wasn't, you idiot." Nathaniel punched the wall, hissing at the pain before pointing his finger back at him. "It's them. They are selfish; they are power-hungry, they are everything Dumbledore is but for the rebels. What do you think is going to happen when the rebels win against the Capitol. Fucking Grindelwald and his family are going to take over." Nathaniel gets closer to Tom's face. "Who do you think is going to die first once that happens."

Tom pauses, shocked. "We shouldn't talk here," he glances around.

"Come on, let's go find Hermione then head up to the surface."

He gulped, trying to process what Nathaniel was proposing. He bit his bottom lip, the two finding Hermione in no time before heading up to the surface. Once they were a good enough distance away from the door, Tom said, "they'd take out Harry and I?"

Nathaniel shrugs his shoulders. "Competitors who they'd take out—the reign would be almost identical to Dumbledore's." The two teenagers head out towards the river where they take their shoes and socks off, soaking their feet in the water. "Once people begin to realise nothing is different from Dumbledore, they're going to call for the next best people to try and help them—who would be the most influential players in the field. You and Harry."

"We'd die before that would be able to happen to secure leverage over Panem."

"Exactly," Nathaniel grits his teeth - holding his hands to his face. "It's

like it underground."

"Usefulness," Tom murmurs, exhausted. "We're going to have to murder them."

Nathaniel shakes his head, grabbing some of the water before wetting his face with it. "Not yet," he says. "We're on a fine line. We can't kill them yet because chaos will erupt from District 13 which will affect all the different Districts aligned with the Rebellion. If anything, we kill them once we take over the Capitol and end Dumbledore's reign one and for all. Before they get the chance to kill you and Harry." Nathaniel dries his hands with his pants, grabbing the notebook.

Tom glances over to Nathaniel, intrigued. "A secret mission, then."

"Yes, a real one—to protect Harry."

"Who should join?" Tom asks.

Nathaniel bit his lip, "we're going to have to discuss this when we have more time to think. Right now, the first thing we need to do in our plan is rewrite this song, have you sing it, before sending it off to the Districts. Once we have Harry and the rest of the prisoners, secured in 13, we will come up with the next steps of the plan."

That sounded good to him. Moving closer to Nathaniel, the two began to observe the lyrics which Harry wrote. Nathaniel grumbled, knitting his eyebrows together. "I don't even know where to begin," he admits. "Harry always had the knack with writing."

"Maybe, restructuring the song?" Tom tilts his head. "If he wrote…"

Nathaniel passes Tom all the paperwork. "I'm going to take a swim to clear my head, since you're the genius between the two of us, I think you'll be able to work it out." Taking his shirt and pants off, only left with his underwear on. The teenager jumped into the water, splashing his pants, which frightened him—getting the papers out of the way before they were wet. Returning to the surface, Tom glares at Nathaniel as he folds his arms on the rock and leans his head up at him.

"You nearly wet the papers," Tom told him.

"I'm sure they're fine."

Rolling his eyes, he went back to writing the lyrics. After lots of

debate, he cut out the entire first stanza and kept reworking and rewriting the second stanza before they had to return back inside. At dinner, he kept writing and scratching out scribbles of lines he wrote, going back and forth—trying to think about how he'd say it if he was singing it. Neville, the ones who had the original copy, was the first to read the first draft Tom had come up with. With musical talent, he nodded his head in accordance to the beat with the line he was singing. "This could work."

Tom sighed, waving his hand. "What is it missing?"

"A melody, I think. More repetition."

"Okay, I can do that."

Back to the drawing board.

He stays up all night, rewriting and singing the lyrics to Nathaniel, Abelene, Sibyl whilst a grumpy Neuro sleeps even through the noise. Nathaniel clapped his hands together, sleep-deprived like him, before shouting, "that's the one! That's definitely the one." Abelene took the copy before rereading the lyrics, "fuck—this feels evil, Tom." Nathaniel rolls his eyes at his sister's statement. Nathaniel wrapped an arm around Tom's shoulder, telling him about how it was brilliant. Tom yawned, nodding off before Abelene demanded him to go to sleep. Taking his shirt off, he slipped into Neuro's bed, turning his back to them before he was out like a light.

The next morning, he brought the copy to the meeting board.

Esteven brought him to a recording room, after it was approved; Grindelwald liking the lines, his two children impressed before Kingsley went about saying that was him. Esteven told him to relay the lyrics like how he would've when he was practicing. Drinking water and clearing his throat, he began to sing the lyrics. Afterwards, Esteven clapped her hands together. "Perfect. I definitely think this is rebellion material."

"When do you think you'll be able to get the song out?"

"Tonight, perhaps if we're lucky."

Tom leaves, going to find something to do to distract himself with.

Devon was amongst the rebels, drinking at the bar two days before the mission. Pulse was sleeping like the light weight he was beside his side as Devon saluted his watered-down beer with Arianna, Hydra, Corin, Swift, and Terry. It wasn't hard to make friends when he was days away from death. Partying, playing cards, Devon did it all. Mourning his wife, he kissed Arianna for a bit, the forty year-old woman getting him to, and he found he didn't regret it. If he was only going to live for a few days more, he was allowed to live those last few days—wasn't he?

It wasn't until around two o'clock in the morning when the television in the bar turned on and all their attention went straight to the screen. It was a video of District 13, Devon's presuming, someone recording the outback and forest that was there. Then, the instruments and voice began. Everyone recognised who was singing immediately. Devon woke Pulse up. "What?" The leader groaned, squinting at the bright screen.

"It's Tom." Arianna exclaimed, surprised.

"Like Tom Riddle?"

"Yes," Devon nodded his head.

All for the Game
All for the fame
All for the name; legacy
Against all the odd jealousy
All for the remnants of your precious memory

Devon repeated the lyrics in his head, finding them poetic. Although, considering Harry Potter sung a few days prior, he wouldn't be surprised if he wrote this instead of his fiancé. The man drank to his words, Pulse leaning his head against his shoulder, trying to stay awake.

Think of the enemies
Drink for your felonies
Keepin' this battle goin' for centuries
All for the memories of the previous legacies,
For a mother called Lily
For a father called James
This battle for cities
Is All for the Games

"Wow," Pulse slurred, "he's got a fine voice."

“Deep—I think that Harry’s is more fluid with how he sings but I think with the tone he was singing with, the kid didn’t do a terrible job,” Devon told the group, taking another sip of his disgusting beer. “If anything he’s done a good job to sing something Harry must’ve originally written.”

“Man,” Arianna grumbles, “why is he only eighteen?—he’s so hot.”

Devon groaned at the profanity, rolling his eyes at the statement. “Shut up, Arianna.”

Come to Panem,
The streets are full of flames,
Come to Panem,
Where the hangings are deranged
Where once a man murdered three,
There were plenty of trees
In which the children hid with glee
Estranged, enraged
The fight for the dead and the living makes us all free
Let us see
Let us be the key
Come to Panem
Where we are All for the Games

Pulse murmured to Devon. “Harry’s so lucky.”

“Isn’t Harry stuck in the Capitol?” Devon asked. “I feel like he isn’t the lucky one right now.”

“Whatever, he still gets that mouth.”

Still the youngest out of them, Devon ignored his behaviour, also acknowledging he was quite drunk and semi-gay. Although, Pulse doesn’t like to talk about it unless he won’t remember it in the morning. Which is why he was conversing with him about it. Devon will be dead in three days. Why not talk to the dying man who you wouldn’t have to think about telling anyone afterwards? Either way, his youthfulness and cheekiness made Devon think he was doing this for a good reason. If Pulse didn’t have to die, at least one kid was safe from the Capitol’s reign.

All for the Games
Where breached history remains
All for the Games
Where the bleak victory sustains

All for the Games
Where the dead are freed,
And the living take the reins

Devon wolf-whistled, the crowd in the bar beginning to repeat the lyrics like jabberjays. “All for the Games, all for the fame, all for the name; legacy—“ he snickered, finding it extremely funny, the meaning behind the lyrics. “Against all the odd jealousy, all for the remnants of your precious memory.” Standing up, Devon joined the District 5 citizens as they began to sing the song. Pulse joined him and Devon held both his hands as they danced together. In all honesty, Devon almost saw Pulse like his son. Although, Pulse reminded him a lot of Cassie.

Using his boots to stomp on the ground, he lifted his beer to the air. “Think of the enemies, drink for your felonies—“ they got a kick out of that line, “keepin’ this battle goin’ on for centuries. All for the memories of the previous legacies.” Devon noticed Pulse dancing with some young lad and smirked, knowing he wasn’t going to remember it in the morning, but he would. He hopes Pulse is able to find resolution in himself in the years going forward. “For a motha called Lily, for a fatha called James, this battle for cities is all for the game!”

He swung around, drinking his beer as Arianna kissed his cheek.

He felt as if he was on the top of the world.

“Come to Panem, the streets are full of flames, come to Panem, where the hangings are deranged—“ the stomping of their feet exhilarated the energy he felt whilst singing the song, “where once a man murda three, there were plenty of trees, in which the children hid with glee.” Devon almost felt hyped up to die and wished his family would’ve heard this song when they were alive.

Devon spat out his beer when he saw Pulse makeout with the other kid. He snickered, slapping his thigh before shaking his head with amusement. Oh, that kid was going to have a rude awakening when Pulse didn’t remember anything in the morning. “Estranged, enraged, the fight for the dead and the living makes us all free—let us see! Let us be the key!” He laughed, unable to sing the next lyrics whilst everyone sang them around him. “Come to Panem, where we are all for the Games!”

Stomping accompanied their singing and Devon was feeling it. It was catchy and luscious. Understandable, almost vicious in a way. He kept

spinning, too drunk on alcohol to care. “All for the Games! Where breached history remains! All for the Games! Where bleak victory sustains!”

They began to clap in time, all in their own worlds as the last part of the ballad came over them. “All for the Games! Where the dead are freed, and the living take the reins!” Devon screamed, “cheers to mothafucking that! Wahoo!”

He laughed, the song being repeated many times.

The next day, they got the bombs prepared in the slabs of wood they were going to carry to the dam, an onslaught of people wanted to join. Pulse was overwhelmed both because of the hangover from the night before, what happened during the night, and because he had to deal with so many people. They were beginning to call him Commander and Devon told Pulse to accept it, and that he earned it. The kid frowned, flustered, Devon telling him that he should let them help. They had almost a thousand people, ready to help them with their mission by that morning.

By lunch time, the number was almost doubled; eighteen hundred people wanting to join. Pulse was exhausted, his crush—some random-ass kid called Geo—wanting to join. Devon stuttered, shaking his head, telling Pulse he was going to deal with him. So during lunch time, Devon pulled Geo aside and told him how he was going to remove his name from the list; Geo, the boy who kissed Pulse the previous night, flabbergasted. But then, Devon—basically threatened him—into confessing his feelings to him so then, he could confess to Pulse.

That damn kid isn’t gonna get far if he keeps edging his way around the topic itself.

So, by dinner, Devon had a couple on his hands and he was glad, because it meant Pulse wasn’t going to see heartbreak when Geo joined the suicide squad. Additionally, the number was almost twenty-five hundred so they created a plan to split up the groups. One would go first, the eager ones to die, whilst the others stayed behind in case they needed backup.

Pulse wasn’t able to convince Devon to be in the second group.

“Kid,” Devon touched his shoulders. “You’re going to be a great commander, m’kay.”

“I don’t want you to die!”

“Kid, I’ve literally lost everyone. M’ wife, m’ three kids. All of m’ friends. It’s m’ time.” Still, he could tell Pulse was nervous to be left alone. Wrapping his arms around the kid, kissing his forehead, he lowered his head so he was closer to his face. “You’re gonna live for me, m’kay. You’re going to see the end of this war. You’re going to tell m’ all about it once you die, after a long lived life. I don’t wanna see you up until you’re at least forty, kid.”

Pulse murmurs, “I don’t believe in the afterlife.”

“M’kay, does it look like I care?—no one knows what’s gonna happen, but you ain’t dying yet. And wherever I am, I’m going to be taken care of you. From up there, or from hell. Dunno where I’ll be since I’m quite literally the devil and a saint, but you know kid, you’re gonna do brilliant.” Pulse began to cry, Devon taking his cheeks and wiping the tears from his eyes. “Trust me when I say, you’re going to be fine. You have friends to help you. You ain’t all alone.”

“I still don’t want you to go.”

“Kid,” he sighs, defeated, “it’s m’ time.”

Devon wasn’t sure if he was able to convince Pulse to let go of him, but to him, it looked as if he was sorely lacking a fatherly figure which was why he latched himself onto him. Sighing, he knew it was his time. His time to die. His time to reunite with his loves. And if all is good, later—than sooner, Pulse will chill with him wherever that is.

———

Around seven o’clock, the rebels made their way to the dam. Devon was amongst them, in the middle of the pack, all trudging through the mud to their fates. The rain was heavy and the sound of the dam was exciting; the other group, in the mountains, watching them and preparing themselves in case anything were to happen. Devon walked with Arianna, Hydra, Corin, Swift, and Terry. Yawning, someone began to sing. “All for the games, all for the fame—“ immediately did Devon join in, liking the comfort the song brought him.

That the games were everywhere; that his children, wife, family, died in the name of them.

“All for the name; legacy, against all odd jealousy. All for the remnants of your precious memory.” Devon told Pulse all about his

kids, what their names were, all about his wife—and himself. And for him to make a tombstone for them in District 10 once the war was over. That he'd like to be buried there if they ever did find his body, or just write his name so there was proof of his living. "Think of the enemies, drink for your felonies, keepin' this battle goin' for centuries."

He ignored the tears that flowed down his face. He only had two hours left at the most.

"All for the memories of the previous legacies. For a motha called Lily. For a fatha called James, this battle of cities is all for the game." He wiped his eyes when they were becoming too blurred. His boots had holes in them for the amount he used them and couldn't get them replaced. "Come to Panem, the streets are full of flames. Come to Panem, where the hangin's are deranged." He smiled at Arianna who smiled back at him. Maybe, if he survived this, maybe Arianna and him might've had a thing; or perhaps, they were only supposed to be short-lived like this. Still, Kerry would remain in his heart forever.

"Where once a man murdered three, there were plenty of trees—" Devon wondered, who did Harry or Tom know that once murdered three people? It sounded like a complex issue to him. "In which the children hid with glee."

"Estranged, enraged, the fight for the dead and the living makes us all free." Nobody was shouting the lyrics, only grumbling as the storm burned through their resolve to fight. It was making it harder to get towards their end goal, but they powered through. "Let us see, let us be the key; come to Panem, where we are all for the games."

Devon pulled his strands of hair behind his ears, narrowing his eyebrows as he saw the light in the distance. They were almost to the end of their lives. This was the only turnaround point for now. He took a deep breath, ignoring the tears. He was okay to be scared of death. It was only natural. Take deep breaths and think about who he was doing this for. The future generations; his past; his loves. This is who his sacrifice is for.

"All for the games, where breached history remains."

"All for the games, where bleak victory sustains."

"All for the games, where the dead are freed; and the living take the reins."

The song repeated itself.

The singing stopped when they were a kilometre away from the peacekeepers who were pointing at them. Devon glanced up to the dam, noticing how they were getting ready to fire up there as well. He was going to have to brace himself. Whether he was shot, he was going to die by the dam drowning him. Whether he was able to escape, he was going to die by the dam. Whether he was able to fight off the peacekeepers, he was going to die by the dam. He may as well motherfuckin' embrace it.

One hundred metres and they were charging.

The peacekeepers shot at them and Devon ran forward, jumping over the top of one of the peacekeepers, punching the ever-living shit out of them. "Fuck you, you bitch of a fucking—" he kept punching and punching the peacekeeper, noticing how many of the members were dead. Looking at the members who were running back from the inside, Devon began to look up to the dam, watching it explode.

Staring up to the hundreds of tons of water that was about to swallow him whole, he held both his hands up, and screamed. "Revenge!!!"

The water grabbed him and Devon wasn't able to breathe.

It was his time.

Pulse watched the dam break from the mountain, watching as it flowed into the District. Geo touched his shoulder and he shivered at the touch. He knew he was crying, he knew he didn't look anything like the commander Devon said he was—he was scared of failing. Biting his bottom lip, the citizens watching the dam break into their home, the entire lights of the dam broke and that's when Pulse knew they had succeeded in their mission. Lifting his hand to the sky, two outermost fingers tucked as his tallest stood tall, he whistled the four-tune song.

What followed was an eruption of whistle, mimicking his own, for the pride of the dead.

Geo brought his arm down. "It's time, Pulse."

Taking deep breaths, he announced to the citizens. "Head back to District 5, try to find survivors and bring them to the mountains. We'll

survive better up on high ground!" The members of the second group began to return, hurried to try and help the people of the District. Geo and Pulse stayed back, Geo holding his hand. The man told him, "you've done well. He would've been proud of you."

"Fuckin' ass," he grumbles - directed at Devon, "had to leave me here."

"For the best." Geo responses. "Let's do him, proud, yeah?"

Pulse sighed and Geo brought him for a kiss, pausing, surprised at the touch before relaxing to the touch. The man moaned into his lips, touching his bangs. Parting from him, Geo held his hands. "Let's return. We've still got a lot of work, Commander." Flushing, Geo pulled him down the mountain and he was sort of glad he was alive. It doesn't mean he was going to forget about Devon, nor what he told him about his life.

He seemed important even for the short amount of time they spent together.

———

Albus glanced up to the roof of his private study when all the lights were turned off.

Standing up at the intrusion, he began to walk slowly towards his window to find all of the lights inside of the Mansion were off. Power outage, he suspected until he strode to the other side of his house to find the entire Capitol was out of power. His eyes widened with the new development. The rebels took down the hydroelectric dam. Pursing his lips, narrowing his eyebrows, he sighed. The guards began to light candles all around the Mansion—Albus walking towards the basement. Underground, in the basement, he followed the path to the Tribute's Centre. Regulus was lighting candles around the rooms so the prisoners had light.

He paused in front of Regulus, the man studying him when he noticed him. "The hydroelectric dam," Regulus began, "is it down?"

"How are the developments with Kilo coming along?"

"Swiftly, although he still bites people even with the muzzle on."

Perplexing, he thought, what an issue they had on their hands. "I'd like Kilo's torture to be livestreamed to the Districts once we gain

power. If he won't do his work, we'll show them what happens to dogs who don't behave." Regulus accepts that, writing it on his phone. Albus glanced in the room before him, eyeing Harry. He appeared terrified. With bruises all over his face and body—he appeared frightened at what was happening outside. This was not the work of Tom, Dumbledore knew, but everything Tom did always influenced other things. The dam being one of them. What was he going to do with this dog?

Regulus appeared to have a connection with Harry through his own feelings for Harry's father. It's why Dumbledore split Regulus and James up after the first year of James' capture. He was too influential for even his strongest soldier, and Dumbledore would never put Severus on him — due to his hatred of the man. Love and hate, what two powerful things. Albus bit his bottom lip, trying to think what to do about this whole predicament. "Harry is to be punished."

The man swiftly turned his head to him, shocked. "How?"

"No food, only small samples of water throughout the day. Do not bathe him. Do not comfort him. Take the necklace from him, and that bear. I'd like the boy to feel real despair. Additionally, do not stay with him longer than ordered. No more comforts, Regulus. The boy needs to grow up." Regulus knitted his eyebrows, taking deep breaths at his words. "I will tell the torturers what I'd like his punishment to be and at the earliest of times, we start Mission 13."

Regulus gulps, nodding his head. "The bombs?"

Albus eyes him. "Correct."

He plans to make Harry's punishment hurt. It was time to bring out his father. Heading in the direction of where James Potter was kept, Regulus appeared to know where he was headed. He didn't follow but a crumpled look overcame him. This was his punishment too, Albus decided.

Harry was an interesting, complex person. Due to his upbringing, lack of parents and guidance, he was dumped at an orphanage by Sirius Black—who didn't want to take care of Harry, too engulfed with pain to consider trying to raise Harry better than his parents. Albus didn't take into consideration that Harry and Tom would form the connection they had, but—it was interesting nonetheless how his prodigy was going to try and assess the damage that was his love. Looking out at James Potter, muzzled, on drugs, and broken; he was

the most painful of the lot of Evans-Potters. Cevernity was innocent, Albus kept her alive, but in a controlled environment so he could see how she would develop. Her progress was nonetheless intriguing.

Harry was not so innocent like Cevernity, he engaged with the Rebellion and actively fought against Albus so the Capitol would break. However, since Albus did a lot of this trauma to him, he will say he had a part in the way he was now; rebellious, angry, and distraught. In many ways, both Evans-Potter children were emotionally, mentally, and socially stunted.

Albus purposefully designed the system of their creation; having Cevernity locked away from everyone for experiment, having Harry open to everyone for experiment. Still without both their parents, both without any guidance to really help them. Despite this, their reactions were completely different and similar all the same. He made them meet for a reason.

His own speculation and satisfaction.

Harry was a survivor, he always had been. From 'surviving his parents death' to 'surviving him picking Tom' to 'surviving the Hunger Games' to 'surviving the Victory Tour' to 'surviving the Quarter Quell,' it was in his DNA to be one. Except, when in an environment so controlled—he doesn't mind it so long as it doesn't bring him pain. The conditioning, through calling him good or bad depending on how he acted, made him more submissive. The small gifts Albus allowed Regulus to give him were studies to see how he would react; it didn't matter what Tom did. Albus didn't want Harry to know whether or not Tom did anything good or bad, so it was randomised his torture. Still, the gifts were to reaffirm what they were teaching him: he would always belong to the Capitol, even if he somehow escaped. He will always be here, in this room, being tortured.

Cavernity was a believer, she always was. Albus gave her a maid to look after her until she could begin to process thoughts by herself about what she would do after being in the apartment, locked away, forever. She drew, she read books—imagining herself to be in a world like Harry's. Where destruction, where hatred was everywhere. Where she did something to put a stop to all of it. She believed in something more, and if things were going to work out like Albus hoped, she was going to marry Tom.

Tom was going to be his successor, that was true, when he turned twenty-three. It wasn't his time to take the nation when he was

eighteen unlike what Harry said. He was going to wait five more years until it was time. Cavernity would've been twenty-one when they would've met, the two were going to have children together, they were going to be the nation's leaders. Tom might've even fallen in-love with her, if it wasn't for his miscalculations for Cavernity's brother, Harry. He scratched his nose, observing James.

Albus sighed, it wasn't the worst mistake to make in his life but it was severe. Pressing the button to the speaker then rang out in the room. "James Potter. It's been a long time." Albus hasn't seen James in years. Nobody has seen James in years before Regulus took care of him. Even though James couldn't respond, he knew he was seething at his voice. "I need you to do a small favour for me." Manipulating James and Lily had been quite interesting. Out of the two of them, Lily had the most fire. But James… he was the most persuasive and cunning. Lily, ambitious.

Quite the dangerous couple, those pitiful rebels.

Only if they were able to keep quiet for twenty extra years.

James' voice was quite the weapon. Albus smirked to himself, loving the way he writhed. "I will return tomorrow and you will be submissive to me. Your boy wouldn't like it if you were tortured in front of him, would he?" At the mention of Harry, James stopped. What a bone can do for a dog when all they have is so little. Not pressing on the button, he snickered to himself, turning away. He returned back to the Tribute's Centre, wanting to have a small discussion with Kilo.

As interesting as the Evans-Potter were, he had other business he had to take care of.

Watching Kilo through the one-way glass, Charikleia asked what they were going to do with him. The muzzle was cutting into his skin, his cheeks thrashed, and Kilo was tied up like an asylum patient. Kilo's eyes had blindfold across them. Pressing on the button, he spoke clearly to the man who was going to do nothing but submit for the rebellion: which meant Harry. "Kilo," he began, "I've heard you haven't been doing your orders."

Kilo only growled. "Remember, Harry?" He stopped.

Prisoners always told their tell-tale signs too early. Albus shook his head, bemused.

“His execution is only prevented by your cooperation. He is useless to me now.”

Still, Kilo stayed put. “Child,” Albus told him sweetly. “It’s this or I sell his body.”

“It’s your choice.”

Even with the implication, it can do a lot to the mind. Guilt can eat away at even the strongest of people. He told Charikleia to keep an eye on him and to update him on any developments. Albus returned back to his Mansion where he sorted out documents. Harry was the sole reason this rebellion was happening in the first place. Tom wouldn’t be like this if he wasn’t alive. He wouldn’t have won the Hunger Games if he wasn’t alive. Lily and James wouldn’t be so resistant if they didn’t know he was still alive. He bit his lip, reading over his file.

Child
Surname: Evans-Potter
Given Name: Harry
Sex: Male
Date of Birth: 31st of July, 2331
Place of Birth: ———

His own details of the child were scribbled all across his notebook. Dead? Alive? 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. No sightings. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. No sightings. No sightings of Sirius either. 12. 13. Suspicion of a Harry in District 12—unsure if the same Harry. 14. 15. 16. 74th Annual Hunger Games Male Representative. 17. Victor. 75th Annual Hunger Games - 3rd Quarter Quell Male Representative. 18 - Captured. Albus pursed his lips at the notes. This boy has had him on a wild goose chase for years, trying to find any information about what had happened to him. Now, he has him and Albus doesn’t know if he wants to release him back to 13 anymore and let Gellert deal with the mess he’s caused. He almost wants to make Harry his.

His villain, his successor. Make everyone mad.

Traumatise Tom, the boy having to come to the realisation there’s nothing he can do about it. Although, the original plan was foolproof. Crossing his legs together, he began to write a speech for Harry to read on live-television. Making a monster out of what Tom loved the most was going to be the most devastating thing; satisfying creation; devouring notion. For Tom to falter, not knowing who to trust. It was

going to be delicious and satisfying to lap up. Gellert wasn't going to make it easy for Tom. Nor Harry.

Now…

———

Tom wasn't able to sleep.

The dam was destroyed and nearly ten thousand people died—was what the report came back to tell them. Wandering around District 13, it was like a ghost town at night. Slipping through the different rooms and hallways, he searched for meaning. Tried to find something that would put him to sleep. He decided that he needed someone to talk to, and who wouldn't be upset over patients?—or babies who didn't complain about him complaining to them. Sitting in the chair, the nurse brought out one of the three babies.

Holding her in his arms, he stroked her adorable hair. "I'm not sure what I'm supposed to do. All this waiting is killing me," Tom tells her. "Harry's inside of the Capitol, being tortured. I'm not sure what to do about it. And I'm also not sure who to trust."

The door slid open and Tom looked up to see Hero standing before him, nervous.

"What are you doing here?" Hero accused, glaring at him.

Stroking the baby's skin, he averted his eyes from her back onto Hero. The teenager appeared better but he still looked destroyed. "Come sit," Tom told him, Hero faltering. "You came here to hold them or look at them, didn't you?—so did I. I couldn't sleep."

Hero laughed a broken laugh. "After that performance with your song. I bet Harry wrote that."

"Yes," Tom admitted, weepy, "he did."

The victor paused, unsure of what to say to him. Tom didn't have the same anger for Hero that he once did. This whole war and 'who's on who's side' has worn him down. He's felt like he's aged twenty years in the span of months. Hero took a seat next to Tom, only watching the baby in his arms. "Her name's Ase." Tom watched Hero's eyes melt at the sight of her. "Do you want to hold her, or do you want to just watch?"

“Watch,” Hero said straight away - anxious.

At that, Tom didn’t know why, but he told him. “You’re not some kind of monster, Hero. You’re not going to hurt her; you’re not going to hurt me.” He stroked her small ginger curls. “The Games, directly and indirectly, have changed all of us. Even outside of the Games. What those people did to you, doesn’t change what feels right to you. It was wrong. You know that, so even if your mind doesn’t think so, your body will. Your heart will.”

Hero looked up through his lashes at him. “Why did you all of a sudden change?”

“What do you mean?”

“I hated you, after the Games. The first time around.” Hero admitted, gulping as if he wasn’t sure if he should continue. Tom didn’t say anything, allowing him to speak. He wasn’t going to thrash out, immaturely at his words. “After what those people did, I thought you were selfish. I was jealous. And, broken at the prospect of this lack of glory a victor actually experiences after the Games.” He fiddled with his fingers. “But then, you changed.”

“I met Harry.”

“Yes—yes you did. All of us met him.”

Hero sighed, “I hope the Games didn’t change him like they did to me.”

Tom lets his tears fall onto Ase’s face, wiping them from her cute little cheeks. “Mhm.”

Chapter End Notes

Bye 👋 I hope you enjoyed
P S

coney island & Haunted

Chapter Notes

Posted: 10th of July, 2025
ok. I did stuff again.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

ACT 3

Tom had dinner in the cafeteria, sitting next to Hero - who joined them for the first time. The teenager was nervous, being around others like this but with Abelene on his other side, he was much more comforted. He noticed Nathaniel break a part a pomegranate. Asking where he got it from, Nathaniel said he went searching for fruits earlier in the day and came across a patch of pomegranates—although it was weird because they didn't usually grow in District 13 unless someone tended to them. Tom was passed the fruit, Nathaniel telling Tom he could have all of it. Digging his fingers into the small fruit beads, he picked at them, eating the fruit slowly—but after a while, he was growing frustrated and began to scratch from the pomegranate shell, eating the fruit. He noticed how messy his hands were and guessed his face was as well. Nathaniel laughed at the sight, before handing him a white handkerchief.

Licking his lips and his teeth, wiping his hands as if he was wiping blood from himself, he dabbed the handkerchief across his face. Then, the Panem's theme song began—Tom's eyes snapping to the screen. What he saw made Tom stop eating.

Dressed in a white suit, with blood speckles around his collar, neck, and face, Tom noticed the collar that was latched onto his neck. He didn't know what to say. Harry's hair was curled as if it was maintained. His skin was paler than the last time he saw him. His fiancé appeared more sickly, red blobs of skin around his eyes, dark circles beneath his eyes, bloodshot eyes with contacts presumably. Bruises were bleeding underneath his skin, reddening his outfit. Tom was mortified. Nathaniel took his hand and squeezed, trying to comfort him. Harry looked as if he hadn't seen a day's sleep in weeks. Bones sharp with malnutrition. His veins were purple for how light he

was. Unmistakably, there was a blossoming bruise on his left cheek.

“What have they done with him?” Tom gasped.

Harry had his hands folded, passive as if he was meant to do this. Resigned to his position as slave to the Capitol. His lips were quivering, he was shaking. Tears were wielding in his eyes, unable to stop himself from stuttering when he spoke. Everything was screaming abuse and Tom wasn’t able to tell if the bruises where from sexual assault or not. “Tonight, we’ve—we’ve retrieved reports of derailed trains, of granaries on fire, and of a savage attack on the hydroelectric dam in District 5. I’m begging for—*for* restraint and decency.”

What Tom didn’t expect to see was his voice, interchanging the program. “*All for the games. All for the fame. All for the name; legacy. Against all odd jealousy. All for the remnants of your precious memory.*” Harry appeared startled at this, like Tom was. He glanced around - trying to figure out what they were doing but no one gave him answers.

Staring at the screen, bottom lip quivering, he recognised the lyrics - shutting his eyes tightly. “*Think of the enemies, drink for your felonies. Keepin’ this battle goin’ on for centuries, all for the memories of the previous legacies.*”

“Tom?” Harry asks, frightened.

“*For a mother called Lily. For a father called James.*”

“Tom—*Tom*, are you there?”

Harry shivered, knitting his eyebrows together to prevent himself from crying as Barty spoke up, telling him to continue on about what he was previously talking about. Harry nodded his head, agreeing, gulping before breathing in and out, with deep consideration. “The attack on the dam was a callous and inhuman act of destruction…” Tom’s voice was back on the program: “*This battle of cities, is all for the game — come to Panem, the streets are full of flames*—“ Harry shook, gritting his teeth, leaning forward. Terrified. Nathaniel kept holding his hand. “Think about it,” Harry spoke, “how will this end? What will be left?”

Nervously, Tom crying at the prospect of him being tortured like this, Harry shook. “No one can survive this. No one is safe now.” He glanced off to the side, frightened, before gritting his teeth, and glaring back at the camera—*angry. Fuming.* “Not here in the Capitol;

not in any of the Districts." He gulps, pursing his lips. Tom didn't know what to think until Harry warned them, "*they're* coming, Tom. *They're* gonna kill everyone. And in District 13—" Harry began to scream, holding his collar as he spoke through the pain "—*you'll be dead by morning!*"

The screen flickered to the Panem symbol.

"Oh my fucking," Tom felt like vomiting. "They're going to kill him."

Nathaniel grabbed his hand, "we've got to go. That was a warning."

Everyone in the cafeteria began to retreat downwards, the overhead speaker beginning—telling them of a practice drill. Tom held hands with Hero, who stayed close to his back as Nathaniel helped them down. Ron, Hermione, and the Weasleys made sure everyone hurried down safely. Tom was sobbing down the stairwell and everyone began to scream when the stairwell had thunder sounds exploding from on top of them.

It was then when everyone began to panic and race down, Tom, Nathaniel, and Hero being crushed by the masses, Nathaniel trying to look after the both of them as they were squashed against the railing. The overhead fire sprinklers began, wetting them all. Tom shook, freezing, distraught. It wasn't until everyone had passed and the people began to slow when they continued to make their way down. Hero frightenedly asked, "what about the babies?"

And Nathaniel said, "they'll be okay. They're down deep enough that nobody will be able to touch them." Hero began to hurry down but Tom was still shaking. Nathaniel took his hands, "come on, Tom. Harry gave us a warning because he still believed in us to protect him. He's now protecting us. We're not going to die because of fear, now are we?"

Tom shook his head but it was hard.

Harry was getting tortured because of him.

He might've died, if he didn't warn them.

A hero as always.

The two hurried down, Tom choking on his own tears. They had three minutes left to get to the bottom. Hurrying, it didn't take long before they were underground in the furthest bunker from the ground level.

The soldiers let them in, Nathaniel wrapping his arms around Tom once he was inside the walls. “We’re going to be okay, Harry is going to be okay—he’s strong, he’ll get through it, and soon—“ he holds his head, “we’re going to get him back.”

Nathaniel took his hand and guided him to where they were going to sleep, Abelene wrapping her arms around her brother—Sibyl hugging Tom. “I’m glad you’re okay,” she tells him. The teenager wipes his tears away, pressing her forehead against his chin. “Harry is a fighter.”

Abelene turned to him next. “Oh, Tom,” she began, wrapping her arms around him.

Neither said anything more, Tom accepting her kind embrace.

Narcissa hurried over when she saw him and began to say her own words. Kissing his forehead, telling him she was glad he was alive. Tom asked her how she was, his friend telling him about how Lucius, Bella, and Mathis were all settling into 13 better than others. It wasn’t long before she retreated back to them and Tom hurried over to Neuro when he saw his little brother, of sorts. “You’re alive,” he said, touching both his shoulders. “You’re mother?”

“She will be okay,” Neuro nods his head at him. “The hospital will be able to keep them safe.”

Laying back on the bed with Neuro, he wrapped his arms around the teenager. Tom shut his eyes tightly when the roof rattled, the onslaught of terror beginning. He shivered, Neuro keeping him warm. Unlike the Croseph’s, Neuro only liked him and could only tolerate their presence. But when Sibyl asked if she could join them on their bed, Tom patted the opposite side to which Neuro was on. Neuro looked up at him, but didn’t say a word. She slipped into the bed with them, cuddling up to Tom’s side. He asked, “is Nathaniel not giving you any attention?”

Sibyl frowns against his arm. “He never gives me any attention, unless it’s negative.”

“And Abelene?”

“She has friends to worry about.”

Tom stroked both their hairs, happy to look after them both. He closed his eyes, trying to forget but it was awfully hard to attempt.

Neuro was asleep, able to sleep through anything but Sibyl kept drawing patterns on his skin. She drew the blanket over all of them. Tom kissed her forehead tenderly. He murmured a thanks, Sibyl saying it wasn't an issue. Nathaniel was worrying for nothing, Sibyl didn't like him like that and neither did Neuro. It was as if he was their older brother.

It wasn't long before he was awake again due to the noise. "Talk about something," he asks Sibyl. "Anything."

"Nathaniel tells me the Fission are working out a team to rescue Harry."

Tom rose an eyebrow at her. "Why didn't he tell me?"

The little girl sighed, shaking her head into his ribs. "You can't join. The Fission soldiers say that you're too valuable to go on the mission. It's the truth, however, but I still think that he should've told you." Tom kept stroking her hair, the girl leaning into the touch. Perhaps, they all wanted to be touched softly, kindly, and deep down inside of them was a child who was lingering for connection at a young age, being soothed by the words and strokes of hands. Sibyl shut her eyes. "It's volunteer only. Nathaniel's going. So is Ron, Hermione. That's all I know so far."

"Not Sirius."

"Can't be Sirius, he's a parent of us, kids."

"So there are requirements."

"Yes."

He thanked her for telling him. She rested her head near his neck, noticing the engagement rings. Sibyl began to play with them and observe them. "You really love him, don't you?" She whispers, eyeing the different cuts of gemstones he used for the rings. He doesn't say anything. "Harry's always struggled with relationships. He can't understand people like he does with you." Tom turns his head to face her, intrigued. "Nathaniel and Harry got together a while before the Games and broke up before the Reaping, but it had nothing to do with the Games." She fiddled with Tom's ring. "It was because they had a big fight over boundaries, of sorts."

She softly spoke. "Growing up as brothers, those two, it wasn't abnormal to think they were a couple even if they weren't. So when

they become a couple, all kinds of complications broke out in the household." The roof rattled above them, Tom moving his hand so it was protecting her head—and his other so he was protecting Neuro's. "Harry had a surprising mindset. It's like a lone wolf mindset where he has to do everything alone without help. Nathaniel struggled getting it into Harry's head that he was there to help, and I think for a good while—their relationship solely stayed together for sex."

Tom stared up to the second bunk-bed. He stroked Sibyl's hair, telling her she was allowed to go on. The teenager hummed before speaking, "Harry was beloved in the District. He taught children things, helped teenagers survive, but the adults—they were an entirely new world to him."

"Business and sex, I think he used to get on their good-sides." She tights her grip on the two rings. "I wish he didn't but that's all how he saw to get adults to like him. No parents, no siblings, all by himself, it sort of created him like this guide of realistic tactics to survive. Nathaniel tried to get him to stop, and it wasn't like Harry was trying to cheat on him or anything but he had this need to help people. With anything." Tom kissed the top of Sibyl's forehead.

He bore his eyes into her bright blue eyes. She appeared distraught over what she was telling him, like she couldn't keep it a secret any longer. He told her he wasn't going to be upset about anything she told him, but then, she kept speaking. "Harry can't accept people unhappy. He wants to help and fix everyone else's problems. That's why, even when he came out of the Hunger Games, he kept wanting to chop wood, knit blankets and clothes, and do all of those things for others. Because he can't help himself. The only change we noticed was you."

"Harry locked himself in his room for two weeks, angry and upset, he wasn't able to see you at the Victory Tour. Sirius wasn't around, and even then, he didn't open his room. Sirius had to pickpocket it. Self-sabotage is Harry's best friend." Sibyl spun the rings. "You guys are quite the weapons for each other, I find, and I think nobody is better for each other than you."

"Even with the co-dependency?"

"I'm surprised you even know that with the way you act around one another."

Sibyl nods her head. "Yes, even with the co-dependency. Trauma

works in many ways."

She shrugs her shoulders, leaning forward to kiss his cheek. Tom accepts it. "At least you're both doing your load to save each other and pick up the slack you guys have when you're not together. If anyone can help Harry after what he's been through, it's you but I recommend backing off for a bit until you understand what he wants to do. Whether he wants to see you or not. I don't think the Capitol has made it easy to think that you're his fiancé."

"I know that."

He slept for twenty minutes before he was tapped lightly. "*Psst.* Soldier Riddle."

Opening his eyes at the sound, it was Circe. Tom slid out of the bed, Sibyl letting him go but Neuro didn't want to. Tom told Neuro he'd be back before he knew it, hurrying down between the rows of beds towards where Circe was leading him, he found himself in Command. Grindelwald, Kingsley, Sirius, Amelia, Remus, and Lynx were all there. The Commander turns to him. "How is everyone?" Grindelwald asked.

Tom nodded his head, suspicious, "well."

"That's good," he glanced over to the other people in the room. "I need you to do something for us. I need you to tell Panem that we survived an attack by the Capitol with no casualties, and we remain fully operational." Grindelwald leans his hand onto his cheek, observing Tom. Then, his face lightened. "I'm not going to forget what Harry did for us, Tom. He added eleven minutes of extra civilian evacuation to the time we had. That debt will be repaid."

If Tom didn't know about the rescue mission already, he would've probably thought they were going to get him out soon after this. They were. He nodded his head, accepting both those statements, before leaving. There was no other reason to stay.

Leaving, he went to find Hero. Tom should've perhaps done so when they first returned to the bunker. It took a while, but he was hiding in a corner of the bunker. Grabbing a blanket from the nearest bed, he wrapped it around them both as Tom sat next to him. Hero was agitated and frightened by the sounds. Leaning his head up against the wall, Tom spoke to Hero. "They're going to save Gleam and Harry soon."

Hero turned to him, "really?"

“Hopefully once this is all over.”

Standing up, Tom grabbed the blanket and held his hand out for Hero to grab. Hero watched. “Come,” he told the victor, Hero sighing before taking his hand. He placed the blanket back on the bed before guiding him through the masses to where their area was. Sibyl sat up but Neuro was still dead to the world. Tom stroked Neuro’s head before moving back into the lower bunk. He told Hero he could either sit next to him or at the end of the bed. They were creating their own small party. Hero chose to sit at the end of the bed, Sibyl laying back down, the blanket covering all their legs. Hero sat legs crossed. Tom’s on his lap.

Abelene arrived back to them, asking if any of them wanted to play card-games with the rest of them, Tom tilting his head to notice a lot of the Weasleys, Nathaniel, Hermione, Abelene, Neville, Scarlet—all sitting on the ground, playing. Choosing not to, he fell asleep. Hero played with Tom’s toes through his socks, Tom eyeing him when he pinched and tugged on them. Still, despite that, he went to sleep.

———

Albus was irritated, glaring at the dog in the glass.

Chained to a metal pole with his collar still wrapped around his neck, Harry was screaming. The torturers weren’t supposed to leave him alone from now on. Not after what he did. Regulus was somewhat to blame for this miscalculation. Turning to the man, he asked what happened to the submissiveness he showed. He shrugged his shoulders, telling him that Harry didn’t usually act with that much anger—with anything, but he spoke out because he had to. Albus sighed, glaring at the dog, a product of his mistake.
This dog was going to be lethal for the Capitol.

“I don’t care about broken goods anymore, tell the Capitol—they can buy him.”

Regulus’ eyes widened.

“He picked this choice. Don’t feel bad for him or someone else will replace you.”

Turning to the room, he pressed the button that allowed him to speak over the overhead speaker. “Triple the torture, he’s not leaving us until he’s unable to function.”

Unable to sleep, he slipped from the bed and went to the bathroom. Tom washed his hands before heading back, finding Nathaniel awake on the top bunk-bed. Joining him, both their legs dangled from the bed. Nathaniel didn't say anything, but he kept tying rope together to distract his hands. Tom glanced at the rows of sleeping citizens, "I know about the secret mission thing. Sibyl told me. I'm not mad, but I wish you told me about it."

"Grindelwald thought you were going to join," Nathaniel admitted.

"I won't—she said it was because I was too big of an asset."

"Yes, you are."

Nathaniel wiped his eyes, appearingly exhausted, but not wanting to sleep. "I'm going. Hermione, Ron. They're thinking about going. Cho, she wanted to go, but she was declined. Mental health reasons." He undid the knot and began to redo it. "Sirius wanted to but he's a parent. I think Lynx or Circe will join. We only need a small group to get in and out of the Capitol." Tom nodded his head at the information, yawning.

Tom felt like it was necessary to speak. "She told me about you and Harry."

Nathaniel sighed. "Harry couldn't stop trying to play the hero."

"So I've heard." Tom gulps, playing with their rings. "Although, you broke up with him."

"It was mutually as awful as one another; but Harry didn't care very much." Nathaniel twisted his own hair with his finger. It appeared like they fiddled with things when they both were nervous. "It took me a while to get with my girlfriend, since I still wasn't over him, but since you came and were doing your part with him—it made it easier to forget." He spoke truthfully, "I don't think I would ever want to try dating Harry again. It was a nightmare."

"With the cheating?"

"It didn't even feel like cheating," Nathaniel told him, lips thin. "In Harry's eyes, it was necessary to our survival. Mind you, we didn't have Victor's Village or anything. We lived in a small shack and were trying to do everything to survive. But he kept going out, getting

drunk, and would please anyone so he got on their better-side. It was manipulation on both parties, and after that I would have to drag him back to our house where he'd then try and get handsy with me. But, after seeing what I've seen, I knew he was only doing it because he felt obliged. To try and get on my good side."

He created another knot, unloosing it to restart. "It's why I don't care that most of the adults in District 12 are dead. They kept asking, and asking, and asking too much from him—as if he was a burden, not being from 12, so they could keep getting him back into their grubby hands." Nathaniel admits, "sometimes I would get him drunk and instead of let him out; I'd let him fuck me so he'd stay inside and not leave. I thought it was better than the alternative."

Tom nodded his head, understanding.

He would be too possessive to let that happen though.

He'd kill anyone who would try to touch him.

"I was angry, Harry was angry. Neither of us were happy because we kept destroying each other. It wasn't as if he wasn't a bad partner, but he wasn't a good one either. He kept telling me that he was doing it for us—but I didn't want to believe that. He would sing too, which caught everyone's eyes, and play instruments. He was a hunter, who helped people get food, and a gatherer. At school, lots of the students wouldn't even pay attention to what else was happening around them so they could stare at him." Nathaniel gritted his teeth. "He was gorgeous. Certainly out of everyone else that was in our school. No Merchant kid could match up, nor any Seam. He was kind and helpful. Too helpful. Whenever I was at school with Harry, I didn't feel overshadowed by anything. His attention was always on his partner, but everyone was jealous of me."

"Abelene and Sibyl were even having troubles when we were dating," he frowned. "Girls were jealous of me. Didn't want to be their friends or would say shit about me that they didn't accept as my sisters, and with the rest of the details; the night outs. I couldn't cope. Harry cares, he cares about everyone too much, not to be able to care for himself. So… when you came, I was happy."

"Not jealous?"

"Not at all," Nathaniel shook his head. "No, as much as Harry is pretty and gorgeous, he has his issues I'm not ever going to be able to solve. You, on the other hand, might. They're deep wounds. From

circumstances surrounding how he grew up, needing to be useful and helpful. Susceptible to violence and abuse. But you already understand, you grew up with him too." He kept twisting the rope, keeping his hands entertained. "I see the way you two work. Back when you came to 12. I saw how he was happy. Afterwards, he didn't go anywhere—he stayed with us. No more drinking until you came. It got bad, really bad, but you were there to help."

Nathaniel sighs. "You have your issues too. I've seen them." Tom hums.

"But, I think it's what helps Harry—to know he's not alone."

The teenager continues to knot the rope. "It's why I've helped you. Sometimes Harry can't comprehend where you have issues, dealing with things. Like 12, for example. Pretty prince in the wilderness." He chuckles, Tom glaring at him. "Harry didn't get that it was hard for you to move to such a different environment for a while but you did it for him. It's why some days I told Harry to let you stay inside because I noticed you were agitated. Or in District 13 where your temper is hardly controllable when you don't get what you want."

"My family is perceptive." Nathaniel tucks a curl behind his ear. "My mother liked to tell me about people before she died because she had no one else to talk to her besides me who would understand. My girlfriend has her own issues as well so we've mutually broken up." He sighs, fiddling with the rope. "Still, as bad as it sounds—this codependency you have helps your traumas. Where you lack care, Harry cares. Where Harry lacks care, you care. It works both ways because you care about different things. You care about Harry. He doesn't care about himself. Harry cares about you, you don't really think of the consequences of your actions—which tells me, you don't care nearly enough about yourself to care."

"Low blow," he tells Nathaniel.

The teenager chuckles. "Hey, at least you two work."

Nathaniel smirks softly. "Harry's more of my brother now, like you are." He nudges his shoulder, cheekily, Tom smiling small back. "I don't think I would ask for another outcome, to be honest, you and Harry are too good for each other. At least nobody was jealous of you when you arrived," Nathaniel snickered, "they were all jealous of Harry - but to be fair, nobody could say anything about how much of a power couple you were 'cause they didn't want to get into this," he

circles Tom, “mess.”

“Oh, come on.”

“It was the truth. But you’re quite good together so nobody said anything.”

Yawning, Nathaniel nudged him. “Bed, you can sleep up here, downstairs is too crowded.” Looking down, he noticed how Abelene and Ness were sleeping together in that jumble of a mess he started with Neuro, Sibyl, and Hero. Tom snorted, Nathaniel rolling his eyes. “I’m not sure how five people are sleeping in the same bed but they don’t have bars like up here so I’m guessing they’re all going to be on the floor, groaning tomorrow.” Tom lays back on the bed, Nathaniel putting the blanket over his legs as he slipped in beside him.

Then, he contemplated. “I think once this war is over, I’ll begin smoking.”

“Smoking?”

“Yeah, I think I want to.”

“I’ve smoked before—depends on what we’re talking about, vapes, cigarettes? Being in the Capitol’s elite means I’ve had access to all kinds of those things my entire life. I prefer smoking cigarettes and drinking caffeine. Coffee.” Tom shrugs his shoulders. “Maybe after this, you and I can smoke together; I don’t think Harry will be very enthused but he’d be glad we’re getting along.” Nathaniel nodded his head, thinking.

Nathaniel snickered, “cheers to that then.”

Tom falls asleep.

———

The next morning, Tom woke up to someone tapping him awake. Groaning, he sat up to find Circe and Lynx calling out to him. He coughed, surprised to find them there. “We’ve been calling out to you for five minutes, Soldier Riddle.” As if he wasn’t unconscious, he yawned, rubbing his eyes.

“Okay,” he exhaled, “what do you need?”

“The bombs have stopped, we’re heading up to the surface — you’re

coming with us."

Tom froze, gulping, remembering he accepted that deal. Sliding from the bed and landing on the ground, Circe and Lynx flushed slightly averting their eyes from him. Tom wasn't sure what they were blushing at but nothing was wrong until he realised there was drool on his shirt. Glancing up at Nathaniel, he sighed before asking Sibyl about it. "Yes," she snickers, "he drools." Shrugging his shoulder, he followed the soldiers out of the bunker. The machine door opened for them, Tom noticing the camera crew standing there.

Avian gave him his lines. "To the people of Panem," Tom murmured, "I'm here to tell you—" he yawned, "we survived an attack from the Capitol and we remain fully operational, without casualties." It was short and a quick speech, he rubbed the sleep from his eyes.

When he looked up to see where he was going, he noticed Lynx and Circe couldn't keep their eyes off him. It was extremely odd and they stopped by his bedroom so he could get changed. Francisca dabbled with a little eye makeup to get rid of the circles underneath his eyes but that was all before they headed up to the surface. The rest of the citizens were able to return and to help with the clean up as they did the propaganda. Nathaniel swiftly cut towards them so he was following the group. He asked, "what the hell happened?"

"You drool apparently," he shrugs, "I dunno—why?"

"Sibyl said for me to follow you guys."

"Ah, we're doing more propaganda."

Nathaniel appeared suspicious at this. "Why don't I believe you?"

Tom handed him his card. Nathaniel read this. "It's like a report."

Narrowing his eyebrows, Nathaniel passed the sheet back to him. The two walked together up towards the surface, passing when they saw what was out there. Roses. White roses, like the colour Harry wore for his interview. There were also a multitude of lilies on the boulders as if they were ripped from the ground. *For a mother called Lily.* Tom's eyes widened, pausing. Wait. He began to shake his head as if he was imagining it. These… these are for him. Revenge.

Avian tells him to say his lines but he can't. *For a mother called Lily*, ever since Tom was adopted, there was always a patch of lilies growing in the garden Snape took care of. That night, when Tom

returned home drunk after hearing about the first reaping. That was the Lily Garden. *Lilies*. Roses, like the ones that are sprinkled out like this, without an imperfection, he held a rose—turning it. It was entirely white. “Tom,” Nathaniel began, “are you alright?”

Lilies.

My ol’ ma, Lily. For the ol’ pa, James.

They were dead, weren’t they?

Then, it came together for him.

Tom shook his head, saying to them, “I can’t do this—I can’t,” Nathaniel stepped forward and hugged his shoulders, Tom whispering, “they’re going to kill them. They’re going to hurt him, through them. I can’t help Harry—they’re going to hurt them and this is revenge.” Tom had to get out of there, he couldn’t do this. Nathaniel helped him move from the sight, the camera crew and the Fission siblings watching as they left back into the building. Nathaniel sat him down far enough from the entrance. “His parents,” he began, “this is revenge.”

“His parents?” Nathaniel knitted his eyebrows together. “They’re alive?”

“Lilies, those flowers that weren’t roses, were lilies. Harry’s mother is Lily. The lyrics in the original song go, *my ol’ ma, Lily. For the ol’ pa, James.* I sung, *for a mother called Lily. For a father called James.* Regardless, they’re there. In the Capitol. That’s who was at gunpoint. His mother. Father. One of the two.” The teenager held both his cheeks as he cried. “I can’t help him.”

Nathaniel leant his forehead to Tom’s. “I’ll save them. Everyone else is going to save Harry. I’ll look for Lily and James, m’kay?”

“If anything, they’ll be locked up harder than Harry.”

The teenager wrapped his arms around Tom. “You don’t have to do the speech if you don’t want to. I’ll find someone else to do it for you. Abelene, Sibyl, myself. Anyone can do it. It doesn’t have to be you this one time. I’ll explain the situation to the Fission, they’ll understand.”

“But—but you said we’re going to have to kill—“

“Not yet, Tom. Not yet. They’re still our allies.”

“Okay, I trust you.”

Regulus hated himself.

Everything about his life made him hate himself. He was too weak, unlike his brother, to join him. He got wrapped up with Dumbledore’s biddings too early, too young. Before he was able to form his own opinions. Dumbledore kept him at arms’ length so if he did something out of place, he would be able to punish him. He gulped, staring at Harry through the window. The boy reminded him too much of his father, who he was forbidden from seeing.

James was kind, soft-spoken, knowing who he was. It’s why originally Dumbledore put Regulus on him. James knew Regulus was Sirius’ brother and this was the ultimate punishment. But this was nearly eighteen years ago. The two formed a companionship, understanding where they both came from and lied with their ideals. Regulus knew James was in-love with Lily, that was okay. He could cope not being with him; because he couldn’t. But he was young, stubborn, and angry. Furious at how Dumbledore was able to persuade people, wanting of a life more than torture.

So when Harry, James’ son, showed up on the front step of the Black’s Estate, he knew what he had to do. For James and Lily. Picking up the small basket, with the infant who wasn’t older than a few months, he left his home and found the furthest orphanage from the centre of the Capitol. Signing Harry into the orphanage, the ladies happy to take the boy in — Regulus said he was his son for the sake of lies. That his uncle, Sirius, will check-in on him ever so often to make sure he was okay. Then, he stalked out to find his brother. That fucking asshole.

He left home for five months.

In those five months, he went to District 2, District 12, and District 4 with no luck, remembering the house they had on the beach at 4. When he returned to the Capitol, he lurked around until he went underground and found him. Regulus immediately knew who Sirius was when he found him. And he told him about what the Capitol was trying to do, and what he had to do. Protect Harry, for James and Lily. That he wouldn’t be able to because people kept spying on Regulus to see where his loyalties laid. He told his brother to head to District 12, create a life there, hide, and come back for Harry when he was ready. That Regulus would transfer Harry’s letters to him and Sirius’ back to

the boy. Sirius agreed and they went their separate ways.

Regulus looked after this boy, in front of him, who was getting tortured for years.

Indirectly and directly. He narrowed his eyes at him, watching him get tortured.

It felt like it was all for nothing.

James wouldn't be proud of him.

Regulus was going to get killed if he rebelled.

He found, he didn't care anymore.

Fiddling with Harry's engagement ring, this kid had a life for him outside of this cage. He wasn't a dog, nor was he a boy. They made him a monster because they could. Regulus gulped, not sure if he could watch this for any longer. Grabbing his gun, he was glad the power was still down. It meant nobody would be able to contact Dumbledore. Regulus clicked the door opened.

It wasn't hard to shoot the Capitol torturers. Neck, neck, neck. All paralysed. Harry was sobbing, bleeding, and was hardly able to breathe. A dead man was on top of him and Regulus kept shooting them. Afterwards, he ripped the man from Harry, grabbing the boy and unlocking the collar from his neck—reattaching it to the man who kept hurting him. Harry was naked and Regulus picked him up, holding him close. "You're okay, Harry. No one is going to hurt you."

Harry kept sobbing into his chest and Regulus knew those words weren't going to soothe him at all from the amount of times he's said them to him. Instead, he passed Harry his engagement ring. Whispering, he told him, "you've got so much more to live for than this. Come," both Harry's hands were wrapped around Regulus' neck as he took him to his mother.

Regulus shot everyone on his path, killing them instantly, dragging them back into the nearest rooms so nobody else would run into them. Harry kept himself latched to him. His neck was bruised from the tightness of the collar, a thick line wrapping itself around him. After what happened with the interview, Dumbledore couldn't care anymore about him. He was a liability rather than something of use.

Entering Lily's room, closer than James'—Lily sat up immediately

when she saw the two of them. “Harry,” she detached herself from the pole, hurrying over to the two of them. Harry was hardly able to speak, shaking, traumatised. Regulus gave Lily Harry, untying the collar from her. She watched, with tears in her eyes. “What happened, Regulus?”

“What do you think, Lily.” He gritted his teeth. “I couldn’t let them keep doing it to him.”

Her eyes widened, “you killed them?”

He pursed his lips. “I had to.”

“Dumbledore is going to kill you.”

“Not if he doesn’t know where I am.”

Lily pressed a kiss to his forehead, holding her son as he passed out. Regulus said for her to hide in the bathroom and to wash off all the blood and cum from him. She cried, thanking him. Regulus gave her his keycard so she would be able to lock herself inside of the room, even if someone else tried to open it. He told her the key word was Sirius. Leaving, it was time to kill all the other torturers. To collect the prisoners, to get them to escape. Regulus called his emergency number whilst he killed, and killed. His brother picked up. “Regulus?”

“Sirius,” he responded. “I’m taking them to the Tribute’s Centre.”

“You’re with them?”

“Harry’s in terrible shape. He’s going to need a doctor.”

“Okay—alright, how long do you think you have?”

“I’m getting James and the others. Harry is with Lily. I dunno. A day at the most.”

Sirius swallowed, anxious. “Our team will be there by tonight.”

“Hurry.”

Regulus hung up, hurrying over to where James was hidden away. After years of recognising the path, he was able to get to him swiftly. Cavernity was down from him. Entering his room, he immediately hurried over to him. At his footsteps, James lifted his head up from where he was laying. He was tied up and muzzled. Dumbledore said it was to stop the mockingjay from singing. Regulus immediately began

to untie him. “James,” he said, “Harry’s hurt. I’m getting you guys out of the Capitol.” Harry’s father inhaled sharply, Regulus taking the muzzle from his face.

Usually, if the power was working, Dumbledore would be alerted to the motion. Punishment would occur. Luckily, the dam was down and it destroyed most of the power, all of the generators. Regulus unclipped his blindfold and collar from his skin. Taking the handcuffs from him. The minute he could speak, James’ raspy voice spoke. “What happened to my son, Regulus?”

“I tried, James. I tried. Dumbledore stood there, watching for ages. I couldn’t do anything but wait until he was gone to kill them.” James hugged Regulus, Regulus helping him from the bed. “We’ve got to go. I’m going to get Cavernity.”

“Where is Harry?”

“With Lily, they’re in the bathroom of her room.”

“I’m going.”

“Wait!” Regulus hands James a gun. From his peacekeeper training, he would know how to handle it. “Stay safe, James. The word is Sirius. She has my keycard. If anything, lock yourself in there with her.” James nods his head, heading in the opposite direction, Regulus goes to Cavernity’s makeshift apartment. Banging on the door, he shoots someone who runs. Cavernity opens the door for him.

She blinks. “You’re Harry’s—“

“We need to go, Cavernity.” He tells her. “Harry’s in trouble. I’m getting you guys out of here.”

His sister’s eyes widened, shocked and frightened. “Really?”

“Yes, come. Leave everything behind. None of it matters.”

Regulus takes her to where Lily’s room is. The two run, Regulus passing her another one of his guns so she could take care of the torturers if they came for her. The man knocks on Lily’s bathroom door, saying ‘Sirius’ when she opens the door. James is in the bathtub with Harry, holding him as he sobs. Both parents cry, Lily holding the gun. Then, Cavernity meets her parents. Standing there, watching the situation, Regulus takes deep breaths. “This is your daughter.”

“Harry,” Cavernity began, watching him in the tub. “What happened to him?”

“Harry did something brave and stupid,” Regulus said. “He shouldn’t have said anything.”

Nobody knew what he was talking about. “District 13 was bombed. Harry told the camera about it. It’s why Dumbledore did this to him because he’s a liability, now, we need to go to the Tribute’s Centre. I need to take you there. Sirius is coming for us.” Lily holds her daughter’s hands, observing her. James stares at her as well. Sighing, he knew this was going to take some time. “Come on, I need to go get the other prisoners as well.”

James stood up, holding his son. Lily took her daughter’s hand. Regulus grabbed a pair of pyjama pants and a shirt for Harry to wear so he wasn’t fully nude. He took them to where the other prisoners were being held. Regulus was on a killing spree, shooting every torturer he could. There were hundreds in the prison. Hurrying, he found the room where the others were locked in. Surprisingly, there weren’t many people alive. Only Ceres, Gleam, and Kilo.

Opening their doors, he told them to come out—that he’s helping them escape.

Regulus helped Gleam, since she was the most weak and tortured, Cevernity assisting Kilo. Ceres was the least and was able to move on her own. He took them through the underground passageways until they reached the Tribute’s Centre. He took them up the stairs because the elevator wasn’t working, knowing that Dumbledore wouldn’t know he would take them here. When they got to the roof, the storm brewing above them, nobody was going to see them from the garden Dumbledore kept up there. Inside, he began to help with their injuries. Harry sat on James’ lap, the father holding his son protectively. He asked, eyes dead, “sexually assaulted?”

“Multitude of times, he’s quite overwhelmed. He’ll need an IV.”

Gleam looked horrified. Regulus told her, “he told 13 about the bombings.”

She sharply inhaled, “that boy.”

“Regardless, the hydroelectric dam is down.”

“Really?” Kilo laughed almost like a dead man walking. “I helped.”

That surprised Regulus. He was trapped whilst the dam went down. Kilo explained, “our team in 3 helped alert 5 that the dam would be the weak spot to hit. Suicide mission by all means, but so was everything else with this war. Then, captured, everything else happened. Now this. I’m glad some of our efforts meant something.”

“Let’s hope you guys are rescued before the Capitol finds us.”

“Aren’t you coming with?” Lily asked, “you helped our son.”

Regulus shook his head. “With the amount of people I’ve killed, I deserve death, Lily.”

She gulped, shaking her head. “No—Sirius wouldn’t like that. Neither do I or James. You’re coming with us and we’re going to get your charges dropped.” Regulus bit his lip, thinking about it. He’s never sexually assaulted anyone, and despite torture not being his forte, he still assisted with it. Still watch Harry—he shuttered, gritting his teeth. He needed to stay and fix his mess. Find out what the Capitol was going to do. Take down the Capitol from the inside.

James began to cry, his bottom lip wobbling. “No, Regulus. Don’t.”

“James—“ Regulus frowned, knitting his eyebrows together. “I can’t stay.”

“They’re going to kill you if you don’t.”

“Grindelwald will kill me regardless. I’m a threat.”

“Are you?” Cavernity asked, unsure. “You saved us.”

“You’ll find out who I am soon enough, kid.”

Chapter End Notes

another chapter down! sorry guys for the wait

ivy

Chapter Notes

Posted: 10th of July, 2025
another one bites the dust

Nathaniel got word from Grindelwald that the mission to rescue Harry was happening that night. He began to get ready, stripping from his clothes into his military soldier outfit. Hermione, Ron, Lynx, and Circe joined them. The last person to come with them was Amelia. She said that she wanted to help, and without any kids, she could come. Nathaniel bidded Tom a goodbye, Abelene and Sibyl able to look after him whilst they went to the Capitol. Apparently, from Sirius' investigation—they were in the Tribute's Centre so all they had to do was get through the barrier around the Capitol and then head there.

Sirius passed Nathaniel a note he wanted passed onto Regulus. He wasn't sure who that was but he didn't touch it, keeping it in his pocket as he boarded the hovercraft. All geared up, the night starting to gloam over them early due to the storm racking over Panem, Nathaniel wasn't sure how they were going to get into the Capitol and out without being detected but accepted things for what they were; fucked and they had to take risks.

Tom sat with the babies, making sure they were all okay after the attack. Narcissa was with him. "What do you think?" She said, smiling down at the little ones. "Do you think you'd want one?" Unable to answer that, not knowing, he shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know, Narcissa." He admitted. "Maybe one day, if Harry wants them."

"I think you two will be good parents if you do."

Tom distracted himself, not wanting to know if the opposite happened and Harry was dead.

Esteven had Neuro and Gamma sit next to her as she was in Commands. Grindelwald was watching her and she kept hacking into

the system. Another hacker group jumped into the system to help her, Esteven recognising them as her crew back from District 3. She smiled, continuing to click on various buttons to type in and add more code to disturb the system. Glancing at how she created the works, she sat back. Neuro said. “So if you jam the noise into the system, nobody will be able to communicate with each other.”

“Exactly,” she smirked. “Do we have a participant?”

Grindelwald nodded his head at her, softly smiling. “Yes, we do. Volunteered.”

“Oh?”

She linked the footage from the camera onto the system for when they were going to start. Radian Rust and Iris Blues sat, watching her work. She was teaching her children how to do the things she could, alongside Neuro and Gamma. She might not be a genius but when it came to her profession, she was and it had to be taught on. Esteven turned her gaze to Grindelwald. For someone who sent both his children on a mission, he appeared relatively calm. They could die. Doesn’t that worry him? Esteven purses her lips. Silver would be proud of what they were doing.

Then, Esteven’s eyes widened. “Hero?”

Tom’s eyes widened when he saw Hero, on the screen, before all the flowers. Dressed with a raincoat, a red scarf—one that Harry knitted what felt like ages ago—wrapped around his neck, he was before the camera. Narcissa stood by him, the two walking towards the cafeteria. His lips were glossy, his eyes were red and exhausted, but he stood in front of the camera. “Hello Panem,” Hero began, “District 13 was attacked by Capitol bombers. We’re alive and well.”

The victor frowned but his words weren’t upsetting. “Due to a warning, a precious one, everyone in District 13 is alive. Not a single causality occurred. Additionally, 13 is fully operational.” Hero had a golden bracelet wrapped around his wrist. “In spite of this information, it’s not what I’ve come to talk about with you today.”

“I’ve come to talk to you about what real life is like for a victor.”

Tom’s eyes widened, “he’s not—he is, oh…”

Narcissa held his hand, the two walking down towards the cafeteria so they would be able to join the others that weren't on the mission. Hero kept speaking, slowly and lowly, but he never stopped. "I won the 73rd Annual Hunger Games when I was 18, two years ago. I'm twenty now." He fiddled with the bracelet on his wrist. "When I was 19, it was the 74th Annual Hunger Games everyone was celebrating. From high and low, it was the final Games before the 3rd Quarter Quell which everyone was excited for."

"What I didn't know was that on my Victory Tour, six months beforehand, I was going to be offered one of the most horrendous things anyone could have imagined." He took some deep breaths, averting his eyes from the camera to the ground. To his feet, as if trying to remember to keep standing and not to fall over. Tom gritted his teeth, rubbing his eyes. "President Dumbledore visited me once I returned home. He said that when the next Hunger Games occurs, I'm going to be offered up…"

He bites his bottom lip, "the pain's still fresh no matter how long ago that was but victors are given a choice. You either murder your own family or endure the abuse the richest of the Capitol have to offer you. I've been given permission to say that the first one of us to be given the choice was District 12's oldest victor, Remus Lupin."

Tom knew what was happening, deciding to head to Commands he wanted to see it for himself. Narcissa followed behind him. "Remus Lupin, on his Victory Tour, after winning the 2nd Quarter Quell was offered the same ultimatum. Originally, because no one else had gone through it before—he declined because he didn't know the consequences of what that decision would bring. His family died in 'accidents' simulated by the Capitol." Hero looked up to the camera. "His experience was then used as an example for all of us."

Hero gestures behind the camera and Cho walks into frame, the victor wearing a raincoat like Hero. She began. "I'm Cho Chang, the 68th Hunger Games victor from District 4. Likewise, I was given the same ultimatum like Hero and everyone after Remus." Seamlessly, she took over from Hero. The young adult appeared content with the decision, gritting his teeth together, pained. "Everyone was. The whole aspect to the deal was that every Games, one out of the two victors were propositioned by the Capitol's wealthiest. We were brought and sold, receiving none of the money. Dumbledore kept it all. Except, we were given gifts of sorts from our buyers."

"None of that changes what we went through, of course, reminded of

the traumas every year. Being the youngest victor of a District meant that you were sold until more victors arrived; the longer you were there, meant the longer you were put in that position for. The curse of a victor. Watching different tributes win every year meant you already understood their fate. So… did you want more victors, to go through what you did, or did you want to hold out?"

"Realistically speaking," Cho sighed, "a lot of victors didn't try to get their tribute sponsorships. They didn't want their tributes to win, even at the cost of their District because of what trauma they were going to experience. In the various Academies, the Career tributes had, nobody told them what the victors went through besides what the Capitol promoted."

"Luxury forever," Hero said, twisting his bracelet.

Tom entered Coms with Narcissa behind him.

Everyone was quiet as they watched.

"During the 74th Annual Hunger Games," Hero continued, "my tributes were Persephone Ryde and Alistar Fenlon. Cho's were Pearl Darley and Laurent Crawford." Cho nodded with Hero. "When we received our tributes, from our perspective, we didn't want to necessarily help them win. It was death or the fate of a victor; no glory, only pain. Perhaps we didn't starve but our bodily autonomy was stolen and sold. Still, it seemed like the best option at the time. None of us wanted our families to die."

"The Hunger Games forever follows the victors," Cho took over from Hero, "this or that. Pick between pain or death. Pick between torture and death. What would you rather?—the victor of the 74th Annual Hunger Games changed all of this; and Tom Riddle. Whether the 3rd Quarter Quell was on purpose or it was designed, none of us had to be sold the next year. This year. We were instead slaves to the Games again."

"The strongest amongst us," Hero coos, knitting his eyebrows together. "Is really tugging us down a peg because realistically we're not. We're only people who survived what we went through. Tributes and victors are one in the same, they don't survive their fate."

Tom shut his eyes, angry and sad.

Frightened.

Nathaniel, Ron, Hermione, Amelia, Lynx, and Circe made no conversation.

They were all awaiting their fates as they flew over Panem towards the Capitol. As they got closer, Circe spoke up. “We’re going to drop in and out as soon as possible. Kill anyone who is perceived as a threat. Additionally, anyone unable to walk is going to have to be carried so get that under-control depending on who is the worst off. You all have medic training, use that.” They all accepted her words. Nathaniel bit on his bottom lip, they were so close. Hold on, Harry.

Once they were heading towards Capitol airspace, they all braced themselves for impact.

“Three… two… one… they’re in,” Grindelwald says.

Esteven grins, Tom standing there—only listening to what Hero and Cho had to say. Tom bit his inner-cheek, Narcissa holding his hand, comfortingly. The information seemed to relay back to the two victors doing the talking but they didn’t stop. Cho knitted her eyebrows together. “I’m going to speak on the behalf of Cedric. One of the only times when a victor complicated the rules of this bought and sold punishment was Cedric. He won the 70th Annual Hunger Games at fourteen. Too young; it wasn’t until Millicent’s game where he was proposed and propositioned like the rest of us. I won two years before him at sixteen so we were four years apart. It wasn’t until this year when we tried to start dating.”

She wipes her tears, “during the 3rd Quarter Quell, Cedric died. So did sixty-five percent of the other victors. I survived, Hero survived, Hermione survived, Esteven survived; Harry, Gleam, and Ceres are all who remain. With the addition of the other victors; Remus, etcetera.”

They were in the Capitol’s airspace. Looking from the window, the hovercraft going dark mode, Nathaniel watched as they headed closer to the Tribute’s Centre. He’s never been to the Capitol before but like this, it looked like nothing he saw on television. The Capitol looks beatable. Hermione sighed, looking out to the Capitol, but Ron was quite amazed. Neither sibling moved from where they were sitting and Amelia was groaning, leaning her head back against the wall. They

were almost there, a minute away. “Everyone ready?” Lynx asks.

“Yes,” Nathanial said. “More ready than I could ever,” Ron jokes.

Hermione and Amelia nod their heads.

The group were clipped to the hovercraft, going to be lowered onto the roof where Sirius said they were going to be. Nathaniel took deep breaths, Lynx double checking his ropes were all connected before saying he was good. On top of the Tribute’s Centre, he glanced down when the backdoor was open, he jumped down deciding there was no better way to do it. The pilots assisted lowering them down. On the roof of the building, he glanced around, trying to find them. About to start running, Hermione’s voice beeped into the intercom, “they’ll be in the garden, Nathaniel, I’ll show you.” Turning to her, the two headed off towards the garden together.

With their guns pointed to the door, Hermione said to open it, and Nathaniel did, the victor entering first after him. Immediately did they pause when they stepped into the gardens. A man, around his thirties, had a gun pointed to them. “Who are you?” He began. Glancing around behind him, he wasn’t able to see any of the prisoners.

“I’m Nathaniel Croseph.” He started. “We’re on a mission from District 13 to retrieve the prisoners.” The man tsked, not lowering his gun.

“My brother gave you something—what is it?”

“Brother…” Nathaniel’s eyes widened, “Sirius?”

Lowering his own gun, he reached into his pocket. Nathaniel got the note and held it in front of the man. The man asked him to open it. Unfolding the note, a star drawn on the paper, he showed it to him. Immediately, did the man sigh. “Come, my name is Regulus Black. I’m Sirius’ younger brother.” The man hurried them towards the back of the gardens.

Blood all over the place, Nathaniel was beginning to see what a shit-show the place was in. Regulus had blood all over his clothes and the two saw bodies. “The men were trying to get to them,” Sirius’ brother explained. “I had Lily and Cavernity shoot them if I couldn’t.”

“Lily,” Nathaniel began, “like Lily Evans?”

“Yes—Harry’s parents are alive.”

Both their eyes went wide.

Even predicting this information hours earlier, it still hadn't sat with Nathaniel yet. Entering the back rooms of the garden, Hermione gasped. There, lying before them, was Gleam, Ceres; a random man, a random girl; presumably James; Lily, and… Harry. Cuddled up against his father's chest, Nathaniel felt his heart shatter. Harry wasn't awake, unconscious. He stood still, Regulus telling them who they were. Nathaniel pressed to his intercom quickly. "Prisoners are safe in the backroom of the rooftop gardens. Immediate extraction is to occur." Releasing the button, he glanced around looking at them. "Who is injured?"

Lily and James exchanged glances with each other before murmuring, "Harry needs intensive medical care." Hurrying over to his best friend, Nathaniel points to the other prisoners, telling Hermione to take care of Gleam and the man. Regulus helped her.

"Like you know, my name's Nathaniel. Harry lived with me for years after he returned to 12." James stood up and kept holding his son as if he didn't want to let go. The girl besides Lily must be the only other person in the place called Cavernity he notes. "Let's get you guys onto the hovercraft." It wasn't long after he said that, the rest of the team merged into the gardens. What Nathaniel didn't expect was for Amelia to shout, James and Lily at Harry's parents.

The two parents faltered before slowly coming to their senses. "Amelia?" Lily asked, chuckling.

"Oh my," James laughed sadly at her. "What are you doing here?"

Amelia had a conversation with them whilst touching James' cheeks, the muzzle creating scar-lines that were bleeding. Lynx took care of a man called Kilo, who was apparently the man who helped take down the dam in District 5 through technological reasons, whilst Circe lifted Ceres into the air. Regulus stayed behind, Nathaniel raising an eyebrow at him. "Are you coming?"

Regulus shook his head, frowning. "I can't, Nathaniel. I've got a duty to do here."

James' eyes widened, turning to him. "Regulus, you are coming with us."

"I'll be okay, James. Get your son, daughter, and wife out of here. I've got things to do."

Nathaniel took Harry from James' arms, attaching himself to the rope that was going to lift him up. The two kept fighting and arguing, Lily sighing. Circe carried her up to the top beside Nathaniel. Once he was there, he passed Harry to his mother—glancing back down the other side. Ron grabbed James whilst Hermione helped Cavernity up. So… Nathaniel blinked at the girl. This was Harry's sister…? James appeared serious with his threats. "Regulus, there is no point in staying!"

The younger brother of Sirius knitted his eyebrows, frustrated. "James, you will understand that someday, this is the best decision I could've ever made." James kept thrashing in Ron's arms, Nathaniel having to tackle Harry's father and locking him with a seatbelt to the hovercraft. Lily moved over with Harry, Cavernity following their father.

Nathaniel watched Lynx carry Kilo up, Amelia carrying Gleam. Nathaniel jumped down, heading over to Regulus who watched. He pursed his lips, looking at the man who killed a spree full of people to save these prisoners. He asked, "what are you going to do then?"

Regulus sighed, explaining. "I'll be in the underground. Come find me if you have any issues."

"Okay, do you think you'll make it?"

"I'm a spy, kid. 'Course I will."

Nodding his head, he turns back and is lifted up.

Tom watched Hero and Cho keep on talking about the various secrets they found out about the Capitol whilst they were there. About families who made deals with various Districts to keep themselves in power with money. His eyes widened when he heard Nathaniel's voice. "Prisoners are safe in the backroom of the rooftop gardens. Immediate extraction is to occur." He shuttered, turning, Narcissa hugging him.

He shut his eyes, biting his bottom lip, hoping everything goes well with the mission. Nathaniel has Harry. Nathaniel will take care of Harry. Nathaniel will get Harry's parents. It will be okay. Leaning his head on Narcissa's shoulder watching as the volunteers grabbed the prisoners and hauled them up. Then, the screen went dark.

“Esteven?” Tom asked, glancing back at the screen. “What happened?”

“Fuck,” she grits her teeth, typing onto the computer, “we’ve lost connection.”

“What—why?”

Neuro turns back to Tom. “It could’ve been for a multitude of reasons. It’s high altitude over there and even though that is necessarily a good thing, it’s so far—trying to track exact shots isn’t easy. Give it time to reboot, I think it’s only a connection thing.” Esteven frowns at the screen.

Then, a voice appeared over the screen. “Secured prisoners; heading back to District 13 now.”

Tom sighed when he heard Nathaniel’s voice, even without seeing the screen. What was more surprising though was the request he asked next. “Harry’s having a seizure, we need medics on the scene stat. We’re trying to stabilise him but there are too many drugs in his system to give him any anaesthesia.” Grindelwald pressed the button to respond to him. “How bad is the seizure?”

“His body is trying to protect itself. At least he’s not frothing yet but—there are no signs he’s conscious. We’re trying our best to get him under control.” Tom moves to sit on a chair, needing to sit. He was going lightheaded at the conversation. Narcissa took a seat next to him. Then, another voice appeared on the intercom. “Sirius?—Sirius, are you there?”

Sirius, who was pacing beside Remus, paused. “James?”

“Fuck, Padfoot. We’re alive!”

“Oh James, shut up.”

Nathaniel seemed to regain control of the intercom, Sirius hugging Remus around the neck who was sitting down. Tom was going to have in-laws. He paused, staring up to the screen. Grindelwald turned to Tom, “Tom—can you wait outside?” He was about to say no but then, the screen turned back on. He was mortified, Harry, on the ground, shaking uncontrollably.

Narcissa winced, grabbing his hand, dragging him out of there. Tom didn’t want to sit still, in spite of the order. Hurrying over to where the hovercraft was going to drop them off, Narcissa ran after him.

“Tom! You can’t go!” He ignored her, he needed to see him. Know he was going to be okay. They should’ve brought medics with them.

Running up the metal stairs to the hovercraft entrance, he noticed how many medics and doctors were lined up. There were a few beds, all kinds of doctors there. Abelene was there. Turning her head to Tom, ignoring protocol—she hurried forward to him. Holding his cheeks, “Tom, you cannot be here. It’s going to be a frightening situation. You need to go.”

“I can’t not help, Abelene.”

“Go down to the hospital, Sibyl will meet you there.” She says. “We cannot have you on the scene.” Tom felt like ripping his hair out. He wanted to see his fiancé. He wanted to make sure Harry was okay. It had been almost two months and in those two months, he’s been brutally tortured amongst other things. He wanted to see him. Narcissa grabbed his hand, telling him to slow down. Abelene recited her statement to her. Tom stilled, not wanting to leave but Narcissa shook her head sadly before tugging him. She told him, “come on, Tom.”

Narcissa led him down to the hospital. The two of them entered the infant section where they held the babies they were allowed to, Tom trying to distract himself. He didn’t know how long they were in there for, but after feeding Asa with a bottle, and coddling her asleep. She laid on his chest and Tom wanted nothing more to hug and tell Harry everything was going to be okay. Narcissa had her eyes unturned to the roof. “Harry’s going to need time, Tom.”

Tom shuttered, “I know—I just—I just want to be with him.”

“And you will, I think what he needs to know is that he’s safe. Who knows what the Capitol did to him?” It was a rhetorical question. They knew exactly what they did to him. Tom bit his bottom lip, angry. He was going to kill every one of them. All those torturers. All those elitist asses. They were all going to die. Dumbledore was going to die. Narcissa murmured. “I think I’m having a girl.”

“You think so?”

“I dunno. I feel it.”

Tom shrugged his shoulders, not really caring about whether Narcissa was going to have a girl or boy but she said, “I was thinking about the kid and you. I want you to be their godfather, Tom.” He paused,

turning his head to Narcissa—not knowing what to say. “Bella and Mathis are already going to be the kid’s family. You… you won’t. But in spite of that, you’d be a good godfather.” She softly smiles, Tom noticing her dimples. “You and Harry… who knows if you guys will have kids? Either way, nobody is going to reprimand you on that decision. It’s entirely yours. With everything that’s happened, nobody will blame you.”

She glances down at the baby in his hands. “But you’re good with kids. I think no matter what, you being a godfather will at least give you a chance to grow up with a child of sorts.” Tom pursed his lips, frowning. Her baby bump was slowly becoming, Tom eyeing her stomach for a moment. “Whenever you are ready, you can tell me if you want to be or not. I just felt like giving you the choice first because out of everyone, you’re the one who deserves it.”

“Thank you, Narcissa.” Tom nods his head, tilting it to her. “Can I tell you once this war is over?”

“Like I said, whenever you’re ready.”

They shared a small smile.

The two of them were in there for a long time.

———

Regulus watched the hovercraft leave, sighing.

With the gun Nathaniel gave him, reloaded and full, he began to hurry down the staircase. He was going to escape into the Underground where nobody was going to find him. After years of training for this, he slipped from the Tribute’s Centre and went through the Interview Building before entering the pothole nearby. Hurrying down the various tunnels of the Underground, he was going to find his hideout. The base, he created almost twenty years ago, to hide all of his incriminating things. Where not even Dumbledore would be able to get to him.

He hoped for their swift journey out of the Capitol airspace, locking himself into the Vault.

———

At one point or another, Tom fell asleep and he didn’t wake up until he heard the sliding door open. Turning his eyes to the noise, he

noticed Sibyl standing there. Narcissa and Tom both had their heads pointed at her. She appeared to have bad news from the look of her face. “Tom,” she began, “Harry’s alive but he’s not doing well. You might want to come with,” returning the two babies they were taking care of, the walk through the halls of the hospital was slow. Sibyl wasn’t in a rush to get there so they kept in-time with each other.

Nearing the entrance of the hospital, the front hospital room was decorated with the prisoners. Tom noticed Gleam, Ceres, some man, Lily, James, and some girl in the masses. Harry was nowhere in sight. Observing the patients, Gleam, the man, and James appeared the worst off. Gleam had her head shaved, littered in bruises. Hero was by her side in her cubicle, Esteven by the man’s side. The man was unconscious, hooked up to an IV like the rest of them, and he had scar-marks on his face from a muzzle like contraption. James was similar. The dark man was ghostly, holding Sirius’ face as Lily hugged Remus. Tom knew they knew each other but he hadn’t realised they hadn’t seen each other in nearly twenty years due to the abuse the Capitol had in store for them.

Sibyl tapped Tom, “I’d like you to meet someone.”

Tom rose an eyebrow at her, Sibyl directing him to another cubicle where the girl laid. She didn’t have an IV on like everyone else. Sitting on the bed, separated, she had dark skin with black hair. “Hello,” the girl began. “I’m guessing you’re Tom Riddle?”

“Yes, who are you?”

“I’m Harry’s sister. Cavernity.”

“Like Lily and James’.”

“Correct.” She stood up from the bed, wearing deep neon pink trackpants, and a neon blue shirt. Cavernity stood in the light, studying him almost before reaching out for the rings. Tom watched her as she observed them. Her eyes narrowed. “You’re Harry’s fiancé, then?”

He didn’t respond, only nodding his head. She walked over to the next cubicle and Tom was standing in front of Lily, James, Sirius, and Remus. He bit his lip, not realising how soon he would be meeting his to-be in-laws. Cavernity gestured to Tom. “This is Tom Riddle. He’s Harry’s fiancé.” James sat on the bed, observing him, whilst Lily’s eyebrows were narrowed at him. Comparatively, Cavernity’s reaction to him was nothing as severe as this. To Sirius and Remus she shook

their hands. “Lovely to meet you, I’m Cavernity Lily Evans-Potter.”

“Evans-Potter?” Tom tilted his head. “Does that make Harry…”

“Yes,” she nodded her head. “Harry James Evans-Potter.”

“Okay.”

He wasn’t about to disagree with her. Unsurprisingly, for an Evans-Potter, she seemed less traumatised than them all. Sirius took deep breaths, observing Cavernity. Remus looked as if he needed to drink. James gestured for Tom to come over, Tom slowly walking over to Harry’s parents. James took his hands, observing them. The man didn’t even say anything, he only observed his hands. “There is a saying in District 2 that the hands say everything about a person. Although, knowing who you are; I feel like I misjudged you.”

Lily sighed beside her husband. “Hello, Tom.”

“It’s lovely to meet you.” He responded back.

“Please ignore my husband; he’s trying to intimidate you for no good reason.” Lily explains. From the pictures he’s seen of Harry’s parents, they looked like them but twenty years older. Time has aged them well, he thinks. “Back when we first had Harry, James said he was going to intimidate any partner Harry had. That’s what he’s trying to do. Although, from training—the hands do tell a lot about a person.”

James looks up at Tom before taking his chin and tilting it down to him. “Mhm…” he mumbled. Lily smacked a hand to her face as if she couldn’t believe what her husband was doing. James kept tilting his head, observing him before sighing. “Okay, I think Harry has officially been rewarded with the ‘good tastes’ achievement.”

Tom blinked before bursting out laughing, despite his despair off to the side. James appeared proud of himself and Sirius patted his back at the notion. Wiping the tears from his eyes, he turned back to Harry’s parents. Lily watched mindfully, James smiling softly. He could see Harry in them. Cavernity too. He sighed, biting his inner-cheek. “How is Harry?”

James frowns immediately. “Bad, the seizure kept going all the way until we got here. I think they’ve managed to calm him down but who knows what will happen when he wakes up.” Tom observed Harry’s father. He appeared wary at all the stares he was getting as if he wasn’t used to the attention. If he was isolated for nearly twenty years

that would be understandable. Lily kept holding her husband's hand.

Cavernity spoke up. "It was horrendous; the doctors are thinking I'll speak to him first."

"For any particular reason?" Sirius knitted his brows together.

"I saw him during his captivity. It would be reasonable for me to see him."

James bursted out crying, Tom frightened—taking a step back. Lily patted his back whilst he cried, the man seemingly not used to handling his emotions. Tom frowned. Harry's mother appeared weepy as well and then, he understood why Cavernity was going to speak to him first. Neither of his parents were ready to see him after that experience they've just had where he was dying in their arms. Tom took deep breaths.

Being pulled aside by Sibyl, who took Cavernity with her, the two stood away from the cubicle her parents were in, explaining. "Harry isn't going to be able to see anyone tonight but I want the both of you on standby. Who knows when he's going to wake up and if he's going to need to see someone. Abelene also told me they're doing a kit on him."

"They don't want any remnants of DNA inside of him before he wakes up," Tom felt like murdering everyone right there and then. Angry. Raw with emotions. "There is this protocol that if a patient is unconscious—unable to make any medical decisions, parental permission takes the next line of formal consent. Lily and James wanted him to be clean off any bodily fluids."

"I'm going murder them."

"They're dead," Cavernity knitted her eyebrows together. "Regulus told me."

Tom and Sibyl turned to her for more information. Cavernity appeared distressed at the thought. "Regulus killed everyone who touched Harry. Shot them multiple times before getting him out of there. He was unconscious by the time Regulus picked him up and took him out of there." His sister points at the bruises around all the prisoners' necks. "Everyone besides me had a collar on. Those collars had needles that were able to inject into the bloodstream of the prisoners, able to subdue them. A lot of drugs have passed through Harry's system, and fight or flight has completely taken over—the adrenaline

heightening the drugs rapidly. Regulus took all of the collars' off because they had trackers on them."

She pursed her lips together with nerves. "There isn't anyone to kill now besides Dumbledore. He's the one who ordered Harry didn't have a use anymore."

"He's dead," Tom gritted his teeth—seeing red.

"Okay," Sibyl touched him, gripping his upper arm, "he's not here. We can't kill him. This is a hospital. I'm going to bring you guys to a room where you can watch his condition with the other doctors. There are around five on standby, with seven nurses in case things go to shits." Whilst they walked, Sibyl pointed a finger at Tom. "I'm also going to bring Ase so you have something else to do whilst you wait because you're impatient."

Tom frowned, sighing, but accepted her request.

Cavernity was confused at who Ase was until Tom had the baby in his arms. They sat together on the two chairs outside of Harry's hospital room. Harry's sister had brown, hazelnut eyes that watched him, Tom having to ask her what she was looking at. It was as if she didn't know what to say around him. Cavernity nervously averted her eyes, holding both her hands to her face. "Sorry," she apologises but for what, Tom doesn't know. "I've never been around so many people before. I can't help but stare."

"Must be weird not knowing anyone here," he turns to her.

"Yes, but what is weirder is that I know you."

Tom was going to ask what she meant by that but she explained her thought process. "You've been on my television screen ever since I was ten. I dunno, I kind of grew up watching you—and now that you're here and I'm here, I don't know what to say to you." Tom stroked Ase's forehead softly, adjusting the baby so she was on his chest. Cavernity shrugs her shoulders, exasperated. "I feel as if the world is moving quickly but that's probably because I'm no longer inside of that small apartment Dumbledore gifted me," she grumbles, "I wish I had lived before."

He wrinkled his nose. "I don't think that 'living' was a lot of fun for Harry."

She bit her bottom lip, not agreeing but not disagreeing. "We're really

opposites, aren't we?"

"Yes, you both are."

"Are you thinking about becoming a parent?" She asks, eyes on the baby.

He shrugs his shoulders and tells her what he's been telling everyone else. Although, this time, he said he might become a godfather after the war so if he really wants to look after a kid but not have to work full-time, he can but really, without telling her, Tom doesn't think he'd mind being a father. So long as Harry wanted to be one too. It didn't even have to be one of his own. Nor Harry's. Tom thinks this entire war has softened him, whilst hardening his edges. He clenched his jaw, he is going to murder Dumbledore for doing this to him.

The two sit and it grows dimmer in the hospital. Cavernity had a blank stare. "I don't think I like this place," she glances around - wary. "It's so gloomy. All I'm imagining is the cells in the Capitol but worse, if I'm going to be honest." Tom bounces Ase when she begins to cry, shushing her and telling her it was alright. Cavernity's eyes turned to him, assessing his behaviour, he thinks.

"When did you and Harry meet?"

"At an orphanage when we were kids," Tom explains swiftly. "My mother dropped me off and someone dropped Harry off there. We grew up inseparable because of the similarities until I was picked by Dumbledore to be his successor." Ase doesn't stop crying, in spite of his attempts to comfort her. He tells her it's okay and that he'll go get her a bottle. Returning, feeding her, he sits back and gives a quick glance to Cavernity before concentrating on Ase. Tom didn't want to accidentally kill her. "Dumbledore was trying to mould someone vulnerable to take his place. I was intelligent. Callous. And pretty. He took those as signs to pick me out of everyone else. What he didn't realise was that my only good bit of myself was there, Harry."

"So… with the Hunger Games?"

"You don't know anything?"

She shook her head, "it didn't play for the past two years, I'm guessing something happened."

Tom grimaced. "Harry was chosen as District 12's tribute. I saw him and remembered our childhood together and decided I didn't want

him to die. So, I lied and kept getting myself into a deeper mess trying to save his life. I think that the need to save him was my feelings for him," he admitted, bouncing Ase lightly. Her eyes were almost golden with how brown and green they were. "I don't think Harry was concentrating on feelings as such, not that I could blame him. It's the Hunger Games. Survival is more important than love."

"So… you helped him?"

"Yes, I did—I cheated to do so."

"Cool." Cavernity sadly smiles, looking directly into his eyes. "I wouldn't have met him if you hadn't."

"Have you seen Hero's and Cho's interview?"

She said no. "It was about what happened to the victors after the Games." Tom sighs, biting his bottom lip. "If I had known—I don't think I would've tried to save him. I think I would've hoped for his quick death, but I don't regret anything I've done." Cavernity told him that it was understandable. Everyone would rather death than pain, unless it was for themselves. The two sit, Tom holding Ase, cooing to her when she had her eyes open, trying to reach for his hair. Although, knowing how babies were after looking after them multiple times—he knows how they like to pull on things, such as hair.

Around two o'clock, Tom went to return Ase.

He wasn't her father.

It was around the same time when Nathaniel decided to show up. Wearing his pyjamas, when Tom spotted him, he got up from his seat and went over to Nathaniel. Nathaniel opened his arms for him, Tom accepting the hug and hugging him back. Nathaniel whispered, "I've got intel." Pulling back, they exchange glances. This wasn't about Harry. It was about Grindelwald and his children. Tom looked around, noticing how many doctors were on standby. Nathaniel said, "not now but," Tom nodded his head at him, understanding.

"How's Harry?"

"Still knocked out cold, recovering."

Nathaniel shook his head, breathing in and out deeply. "He was bad, Tom."

Tom shared his expression, “I know. We’re on standby in case he wants someone.”

“Good idea.”

The two teenagers headed back over to the chairs, one of District 13’s doctors pulling out another for Nathaniel. Yawning, Tom introduced Nathaniel to Cavernity despite the two already knowing each other. Although, it must be different to see Nathaniel without his whole get-up on. Cavernity shook hands with him. Leaning on Nathaniel’s shoulder, he began to stroke Tom’s hair. The older teenager snickered, “did you go see the babies?”

Tom frowned. “Had to—to distract myself. Narcissa joined.”

“He was holding a baby Ase before you came.”

“Really?”

Tom hummed, shutting his eyes. Nathaniel snickered before tilting his head up and down, “yeah, she’s pretty adorable. So is Fornax and Ruby.” It wasn’t long before he was passed out to the scratches of his hair. He felt as if he could collapse in on himself.

———

When he woke up, his head was on Nathaniel’s lap. The beeps of the machines calmed him and nothing had changed. Nathaniel was sleeping above him, with his head leant up against the wall and Cavernity was knocked out cold as well. Getting up closely, he sat up before standing, making his way over to the mirror where Harry was sleeping. He massaged the crevice between his eyebrows, watching as he slept.

Turning his head to see what the time was, it was almost five o’clock. Popping the strained muscles back into place, stretching, he went over to the hospital cafeteria where he ordered tea. Being handed the drink, he returned, watching him as he slept. Abelene started her morning shift early, finding him in the room. “How are you feeling?” She asked.

“Overwhelmed might be one word able to describe it?”

“Fair enough, he’s back,” she winced. “I didn’t know he had a sister.”

“Neither did I.”

“What do you think of her?”

Tom sipped through warm teeth, ignoring the way it burned his tongue. “She’s… a bit socially awkward, but she’s been held captive without being around people for nearly seven years. Her entire life has been behind those walls. We even talked about how she and Harry are opposites.”

Abelene takes apart a piece of bread, handing him some. Tom dipped it into his tea. She debated, “it’s better than not being able to speak to people. Some people, when held in captivity for long amounts of time, can have social anxiety and be afraid of people and what they think of them.” She chews on the bread, waiting until she had swallowed it before she continued. “At least she is able to talk to you, and some of us. Out of everyone they rescued, she’s the least traumatised.”

Tom disagrees. “Maybe not the least,” he says, “but not the worst. She’s going to have her entire life structured around being captive for years. If anything, it’s a worry how her mental state is going to turn out after she realises how awful of an experience she had to go through.”

“Well,” Abelene lifts her shoulders, “she seems to be better off.”

“Anyway,” Tom interrupts her, before joking around, “there is no possible way she can have social anxiety, not with who her father is.” Abelene cracked a smile at the joke, before moisturising her lips, nodding her head slowly at him. “So,” he tried to lighten the mood, “you and Ness?”

Abelene smirked. “I’m slowly getting there.”

“That’s good. I’m happy for you both.”

She doesn’t comment on it further, the two staring at Harry.

He appeared peaceful like this. All those prominent lines he had—Tom able to imagine when he was angry or upset were gone. Relaxed, no tension within his face. Nathaniel was right. After this, he did want a smoke. Instead, he sipped on his tea.

Then, it all turned for the worst. Harry’s heart monitor began to race. Slowly growing higher with his emotions tensing his face. Anguish was prominent, his fingers curling, and his mouth gritting his teeth. Glancing back to where the doctors were waiting around for him to wake up, a few began to entire the room to relax him. Abelene and

Tom could only watch.

Tom could only pray that he was going to slowly recover, not fully but enough to find peace within himself. He would try to do his part, wanting to do more, but.

That’s all he could hope for.

Untouchable

Chapter Summary

Posted: 10th of July, 2025
Gee whiz what the fuck of a typea run amion??

Tom doesn't know what to expect when Harry wakes up.

Placing his tea onto the table, he woke Cavernity and Nathaniel up, the group of four all watching as Harry sobbed, glancing at the different people in the room. Tom turned to Cavernity, "you've got to go in there, he doesn't know that he's out of the Capitol." She asks for Harry's ring. "His ring?" His sister asks Tom to go with it and unclipping the necklace, he hands her Harry's ring. Entering with it, Tom slid his own ring onto his ring finger behind the glass.

Immediately at her face, recognising it, Harry began to calm down but he was still wary of the doctors around him, trying to get him to stop fighting back against them. "Harry," she began, hurrying over to his side and bending down to meet his face. The doctors say nothing in her presence. "You're okay, you're in District 13. They're dead."

"What—what—no-no—how—we're not—" his eyes were all around the room, looking at the lights. Cavernity winced before asking if they could dim the lights, that it was overstimulating them both. She took his hands, holding out his engagement ring. Harry appeared flabbergasted at the sight of it. He kept shaking, nonetheless.

Cavernity held Harry's hands together, looking into his eyes. "I told you - Tom protected both your hearts for you. He wanted you to have this back because you're strong Harry, and he trusts you." Harry shakes his head, with moist eyes, as if he didn't believe her. Tom froze, listening to their interaction. It felt foreign to him. Tom didn't know whether it was because they were siblings and they could instinctively understand each other or what it was, but their thought patterns were on the same wavelength. Abelene and Nathaniel were like him, frozen. He didn't know whether this was normal or not. "Hey, hey," she shakes her head, pursing her lips. "It's true. He does."

Harry only appears exhausted but his heart-rate slowed which made the doctors back off.

"Would you like to see him?" She inquired softly, but that made him

have another outburst.

“I—I-I can’t Cav, I—he’d be disgusted of me—he’d tell me and touch me—“

Tom’s jaw went slack, flabbergasted, “what?”

Unable to finish what he was saying, spluttering and turning into a mess of sobs, Cavernity kept holding his hands together. Shaking her head, “no—no,” she disagreed. “It’s okay.” His sister gulped. “That’s not the real Tom, okay? Real Tom won’t think that. That’s pretend—fake Tom, okay? That’s who the Capitol wanted to believe was Tom. You are smart, Harry,” she kisses his hands, “you picked well. That is fake Tom you’re thinking about. Not real Tom. Real Tom is good.”

Real Tom?—Fake Tom? Tom was confused but he accepted he wasn’t going to understand.

Not yet until Cavernity explained it to him.

There obviously appeared to be torture in which Harry experienced this ‘fake Tom.’ He shivered, knitting his eyebrows, shutting his eyes—trying not to imagine it. Cavernity kept talking and life didn’t stop, despite the fact he wanted it to. Her voice was softer. “You trusted me, right?—back in the apartment, on the couch. I said that you could trust me. That I thought he was good but that I was going to meet him myself someday, before your wedding, and I was going to give you my opinion.” Harry nodded his head at her, but he appeared frightened as if he didn’t want to meet reality. She squeezed his hands softly, “he’s good. Tom is good. I trust him. I think you picked well with him.” Again, she kisses his hands. Harry shutters at the touch.

Overwhelmed, he kept glancing up to the lights. Cavernity noticed. “Let’s have you change rooms?” Told to disappear by Abelene, Nathaniel and Tom were shut out of the hospital. At the front door, staring at where the doctors were moving around, Tom sighed. He went to sit with his legs dangling from the railing. Nathaniel appeared to age the same amount as him, joining.

“Fuck,” Tom shook his head with his eyes closed. “I didn’t know what to expect.”

“Pretty full on, huh?”

Tom wasn’t about to disagree with Nathaniel. The younger of the pair leaned his head against the railing, watching as all the workers began

to start getting up and doing their daily routines. Glancing down at his schedule, Tom noted there was nothing on for the day for him. He was expected to have free-time. Nathaniel, on the other hand, would have to get back to work. People passed them but Nathaniel didn't move, staying with him. Neither felt like moving.

It wasn't long until Abelene was back, yawning as she stretched.

The two teenagers had their heads turned to her to see if she had any more information about Harry. "I didn't see him," she told them. "All I know is that Cavernity is calming him down and that the room was too much like the other room he had whilst he was being tortured. That it was best to get him to another which wasn't so secluded." Tom nodded his head, glad. "Besides that, they're going to try and assess him. Cavernity is staying with him. She seems to be helping."

"Siblings," Tom murmurs. "Do you guys ever act like that?"

"Like what?" Abelene frowned, perplexed.

"I dunno. Cavernity and Harry were speaking on the same level; wavelength, understanding—whatever. It was as if they understood each other more than the doctors or I could." Tom shrugged his shoulders, turning his eyes away from them both. "It's just I don't have siblings so I wasn't sure if that was normal, being able to understand on such a level."

Abelene hummed, appearing to understand what he was speaking about. "DNA, perhaps?" She inquired, "siblings have the same DNA — even without being together for the past seventeen, eighteen years they can still understand each other because they're brains are quite similar. Our brains are similar and we have those moments together and with Sibyl," she explains. "I think having a sibling depends on the connection and understanding."

"I mean, you and I," talking about Nathaniel, "understand each other beyond words. We don't need to talk about things to understand what we think about it. We can say you, and we'd understand our opinions about you." Tom frowns, raising an eyebrow at her, accusatorially. She rolls her eyes, "don't take it literally. I just meant to use it as an example. Different things, we don't have to speak about or explain ourselves unless our opinions are not what he thought the other would think."

"So… families are important?"

“Detrimental to development.”

“Great,” Tom pouted. “I’m fucked.”

He doesn’t need them to say anything for him to understand they’re sympathetic of him. His cheek is cold by the metal. Abelene twirls her hair and puts it into a bun. She observes him, “I’ll let you know if anything in his condition changes but I recommend eating something. Harry’s back, but he needs you to be strong for him. If he asks for you, I’ll come get you but you can’t go somewhere you wouldn’t normally go to. If not, I’ll put it into your schedule for you to return.”

Deciding there was no point in arguing, he accepted her request.

Nathaniel and Tom headed down to the cafeteria where they began to eat. People kept their distance, understandably, but not Iris Blues. Smiling and hurrying over to Tom, he averted his gaze to the young girl. She was happy to see him, “do you wanna know what I’ve been up to?”

Tom, bemused, shrugged his shoulders. “What have you been up to?”

Taking a seat next to him, she began to tell him how the school has promoted her and that she’s going to become an engineer like her mother. Tom ate his breakfast, entertained. Nathaniel slept on the crevice of his elbow, still exhausted from the night before. Tom sadly smiled at her, the weight in his eyes warming them. It was irritating, but there was no reason to lash out at the little girl because he felt disgusted about a part of himself. He kept smiling for her sake.

“I’ve been hanging out with the babies,” he tells her. “They’re growing so much.”

“What do you think will happen to Ase, Fornax, and Ruby?” She queries, upset, “they don’t…”

Tom purses his lips, trying to come up with an answer. “I bet District 13’s staff will take care of them until they’re old enough to take care of themselves.” He touches her soft hair, pulling the strand behind her ear. “Those little kids will grow up without answers of who their parents were, but as a community—we can show them what homes means.” Iris beams at him, flushing.

Iris glanced away from Tom, picking at her food. “I wish we had something better to eat.”

Nathaniel gave another pomegranate for Tom to eat. Grabbing, he began to fiddle with the pomegranate and opened it. Breaking it apart and handing it to her, he smiles. “Here, it’s a pomegranate. It might not be anything like the fruit you might have back at home, but it’s something sweeter than this…” sustenance. He wasn’t going to say that out-loud.

She thanks him cutely, trying the fruit. Tom was glad to make her happy. Lifting his arm to stroke Nathaniel’s hair, Iris turns her gaze to him. She appeared wary for some reason that Tom wasn’t able to pick up on. She swallowed and scratched her face, intrigued. “Is everything alright?”

“Harry,” she said, “is he okay?”

Tom stilled but was at least glad she wasn’t hiding anything from him.

“He is showing improvement but… I’m not sure it could be clarified as okay.”

The clever little girl accepted that answer, handing one of the pomegranate shells with beads back to him. Surprised, he takes it, accepting her kindness. Her smile blossomed wider at his reaction. He began to slowly pick at the beads, Iris murmuring. “I want to thank Harry. For Silver.” Then, Tom’s reminded of what she’s had to go through at such a young age, narrowing his eyebrows at her. Pained for her. She didn’t seem to fully process it, but that was okay. “He didn’t have to give my brother a painless death as Ma calls it. But, he did. Silver… that little bitch should’ve stood up for himself more. Then, this wouldn’t have happened.”

He was shocked at her tone but wasn’t going to reprimand her.

She was grumpy, frowning. “Silver had to be chosen, what a joke.”

“Did you think he wanted to be chosen?” Tom asked her softly, not knowing what her opinions were about the whole situation. Iris only stared at him with blank eyes, answering, “Silver was always talking himself up to be the strongest in our family as our big brother. What a load of bull.” She pouted, “I know it was the luck of the draw but it would’ve hurt less if he didn’t prove himself wrong again, and again. Ma always had faith in him which was why she was surprised by the outcome. Pa knew he was softer than her. Sweeter. That’s why I liked him more than Radian.”

“Now,” she frowns, “I only have that dick.”

Tom choked on his pomegranates, not meaning to but her profanity was interesting.

Nothing new, kids swore all the time but the choice of language was curious to him.

They spoke until Tom was done with breakfast; Nathaniel passed out entirely. Telling the Commands that Nathaniel would be unable to fulfil his duties for the day, he took him back to their room. Tom slept in one bed whilst Nathaniel slept in the other. Tom passed out, not any later.

Lily laid in their co-joined bed, not willing to let James go. Sirius sat to their left whilst Remus sat to their right. They got their own private room to themselves as James slept on her chest. Unable to sleep, worried too much about Harry, she slowly ran her fingers through James' curls. It was interesting how strong the Potter gene was. Both their children had James' hair; dark, textured, curly. Despite this, Harry got her eyes and Cavernity got her smaller features. Luckily, they got James' skin which is good since Lily likes the tan—and it would be a pain to have her skin. Light, pale, easily burning. It was easier for them to have his beautiful skin.

It was interesting how their dynamic changed, knowing Peter was the traitor in the group. Sirius was still not over his brother, despite their reunion, and neither was James. Lily has somewhat of an idea why but James was always going to be hers. Her boy. Her lover. The same sweet fourteen year-old she met back at District 2, the same fine eighteen year-old she heard singing at District 12. The same husband of the Capitol who held Harry whilst she was pregnant with Cavernity. Either way, she wasn't worried about their relationship as such. Engrained, deeply-rooted in similar traumas, James wouldn't be able to leave her—and she wouldn't be able to leave James.

Sirius and Remus were similar in this regard, thinking they were dead for the past eighteen years. They could relate to the anguish. Lily applauded Sirius for looking after her son for so many years, not having to do so but when he responded, she felt ticked off a bit. He said, of course he had to because it was James' son. It was also hers.

She frowned, glaring asking for Marlene, Mary, and Alice—if they were still alive. The two men left her and her husband alone. She kissed James' forehead, loving the way he breathed. She was forever

going to be engrossed about him. Infatuated, obsessed. This was her man. Harry and Cavernity were also her children, they weren't going to forget about that for a minute. Protective, she wrapped both her arms around his waist.

Despite being taller than her, James felt smaller than he once had.

Malnutrition was an obvious sign for what he had to go through. They had a feeding tube that went down his throat because he was struggling to eat. Luckily, Lily didn't have the same issue but she was going to support him through it. Pressing another kiss to his forehead, she felt young all over again, reminiscent of the good times. They were safe, the rebellion was happening, they did their part—it was now their time to recover and try to survive. Their duty to be parents.

When Sirius and Remus collected Marlene, Mary, and Alice, along with Frank due to Alice's association. She noticed two kids behind them. Marlene gave Lily a big hug when she saw her, James between the two still sound asleep on sedative, Mary hugging her afterwards. Then, Alice, Frank, and when she parted from Frank—she eyed the two children. "Are these your kids?"

Alice and Frank hummed and agreed with her. "Neville and Scarlet."

"Aw," she smiles. "You two are lovely."

Neville shakes her hand softly, Scarlet doing the same. They were around her kids' ages. Turning back to the group, Marlene sadly smiled at her. "We looked after pines," and Lily snickered at the nickname they used to call her. Porcupines. Sharp edges with a humorous personality; Marlene called her that when they first met because originally she thought she was a bitch. The woman tucked a blond curl behind her ear. "Pines is a singer like his father and has your writing ability. Quite the pair you made with him." She winks, flirtatiously.

Lily winked back at her, the girls snickering. It was their inside joke.

"So… how did he grow up?" She had to ask. "Took care of him?"

"He was sort of wild," Mary explained, "none of us were able to tame him."

"Nathaniel tried." Neville sighed, "but he was the closest anyone got."

She frowned, knowing that was to be expected.

“With the exception of Tom, of course.”

“Tom?” She tilts her head.

Neville had a boyish grin on his face, nodding his head frantically. “Tom was able to persuade Harry to sing again after the first Hunger Games. He helped him, when no one could. This entire time, whilst Harry was in the Capitol, was trying his hardest to get him back.” Her eyes widened, moisturising her lips at the information. Tom, she averted her eyes to her husband, Lily didn’t not like Tom but she hasn’t had enough time to make a proper assessment of him. Looking up to Neville, she smiles. “Would you be able to get Tom for me? I think I’d like to talk to him.”

The two kids nod their heads at her, saying their goodbyes. Alice and Frank watched their kids go. They spoke, asking why she wanted Tom, and she told them the truth. “I haven’t had enough time to have a proper opinion about him for myself. So… if he is going to marry my son, I’d at least like to know who is joining the family.” She smiles back.

It wasn’t long before they dissembled themselves before Tom arrived. Lily, finally, was able to convince Sirius and Remus to fuck off because as much as she loved them, they were being overprotective for no needed reason. James was alive. She was alive. They were safe together. That should be enough. But no, brotherly love, she frowns.

But then, her frown turned into a small line when Tom asked if he could come inside—that Neville said she wanted him for some reason. James was still asleep, passed out in her arms when she accepted the request, Tom taking a seat at the chair beside the bed. “How are you?” He asked. “The both of you.”

She sighs, breathing in and out, remembering how to speak. It’s been a long time. “Better, I think now I’ve had my dose of serotonin,” she jokes, stroking her husband’s hair, “although he has seen better days. Malnutrition and dehydration has been a pain. At least I’m glad we’re alive,” she admits. “James is a bit pissed off about Regulus.”

“Better to be thinking about something petty than traumatic,” he didn’t make eye contact with her.

“So…” she begins, glancing around at his face, “have you met up with Harry?”

“I’ve been letting him have all the time he needs.”

Good.

She accepts the answer, noticing the small purple rings underneath his eyes. Lack of sleep. Desperation. Worried. Lily plays with her hair with the hand she wasn't playing with James'. Tom made eye contact with her, his auburn eyes sparking curiosity within her. She asked how he was after the whole rescue. Lily studied how his Adam's apple adjusted uncomfortably by the question. "Nervous wreck, I suppose," he scratches his hair, thinking, "stressed. I'm glad Cavernity is able to help him."

"Cavernity?"

"Yes, she's assisting Harry."

Lily should really spend time with her daughter. Glancing down at James, she sighed, they had a lot of time to make up for being captured like they had. Tom observed her expressions, doing her best to control her facial expressions, she spoke. "That's good then."

Tom and Lily spoke about a lot of things. Where they grew up, what their passions were—Lily found it interesting that most of Tom's actual passions, aside from originally training to be the president, was digging up religious texts and studying what their version of the afterlife was and their symbolism within the historic notions. From what she discovered, Tom was more like her whilst Harry was more like James. Lily did enjoy a good book from time to time, especially with history within it. She gave her book recommendations from when she was a little girl. He was surprised, "we had those books at the orphanage," he murmured, "I think Harry's favourite was the Dogs Tale whilst mine was the Cat Eye. Although, that was years ago."

Lily was surprised that he remembered that much, but Tom didn't stop there. "Harry didn't speak much when he was in the orphanage for reasons I know now was that he didn't want to spill any of his secrets, but when he did, it was mostly about how he liked the main character and how her personality changed within the story due to what happened to her. Actually, now I'm thinking about it. That story was quite dark. The whole series was."

She cracked a grin at him.

His other passion was hearing Harry sing and that whenever he thinks of art, he thinks of him. Lily was so furious because she felt the same about Tom—and there was nothing she could do about it. The Potter charm, she accepts and resigns to her fate that this boy was going

down the same path as her. He would burn the world for Harry; like Lily would for James. She groaned and Tom blinked, curious at what she was going on about, before she accepted this was going to be Harry's husband. Lily didn't think there would be anyone good enough for Harry besides him.

They weren't wrong. She had to admit defeat.

Despite knowing their whole bond was trauma-fuelled, Lily wondered how her son would be about to smitten such a man before realising James was the same and she could relate. They were on the same boat and she would have to guide him through it if worst comes to worst. Not like they were many issues but just in general from her experiences with the Potters. Lily wondered if Euphemia and Fleamont were alive in 2 still or if the war took them.

Tom fought, starting a war, and betrayed his legacy for Harry; that was something pretty special.

She smirked, looking up to him. This was the one.

———

Tom was eating in the hospital cafeteria after meeting with Lily for lunch. He thought about what he observed from her. She was a kind of smart, a characteristic which Tom didn't see in Harry a lot but he could see where his genius' stemmed from, this brilliance of his mother. Lily was passionate and loving about things she cared about, and if anything, quite a lot of the things Tom loved in Harry were in his mother. She was protective of her husband, son, and daughter from the way she spoke and even holding James. It reminded him of how Harry and Tom acted after the first Hunger Games, inseparable.

After he had lunch, someone tapped him on the shoulder and he turned to see it was Abelene. Pausing, not knowing what to expect from the conversation, a small hesitant smile was on her face. "He wants to see you but… it's still rough."

"Okay, I can… I can deal with it, help him." Abelene nods in acceptance.

He places his tray onto the stack before heading with her towards his hospital room, memorising the route. Before he entered the hospital room, Abelene gave him a rundown of the situation. "His mind has been hijacked of sorts, with trackerjacker venom. It's a designed Capitol creation used in the Games, but with that and the large

amounts of drugs in his body—it gave the people all sorts of controls over Harry's body. That and the sexual assault." She takes deep breaths before glancing back at him. "He is trying to work out that the person he saw wasn't you. It was the fake you, essentially. But don't try to force him into that thinking, he'll only resort to violence."

"Violence?"

"We tried but it wasn't successful and by we, I mean the doctors."

"Stupid ass doctors," he grits his teeth.

"Exactly."

She opens the door, Tom taking deep breaths before slowly entering. It would be okay. No matter the outcome, it's to make Harry comfortable. Tom doesn't know to any extent what he went through besides that he could traumatise him further. He tries his best to be neutral of all expressions, not wanting Harry to freak out. Tom doesn't think he would've for anyone else. Entering the room, he decided not to go too close to the bed—and fuck, when he looked up, Harry looked awful. Harry didn't have a feeding tube, Tom realised after observing it, it was a breathing tube. Cavernity sat beside Harry, studying him, almost anxiously.

Yes, he knew, if he fucks this up all her progress is going to go backwards. He needs to say something, holding his hands together, he looks down at the distance. "… is this a far enough distance, Harry?" He really didn't want to move but if he wasn't comfortable…

It took a little longer for him to answer. He nodded his head softly.

Cavernity appeared happy by this.

Tom couldn't stand the awkward silence so he began to speak, fiddling with his ring. "I should've told you more about the arena and the plan. The whole point of me keeping my distance was because I wanted you to be safe without having to worry about any of it." His eyes landed back on Harry. "I'm sorry, I know that isn't acceptable on my behalf but… I'll prove it someday. Today, whether you want me in the room or not; or three steps forward or back. I'm happy to comply." Tom bit his inner-cheek waiting for a response.

"Th—thank you," Harry replied quietly. "I'm sorry too."

Perplexed, he tilted his head at him, slowly, shaking his head. "You

don't need to apologise, Harry. You never did anything wrong. It was our failure, and what those people did was more than horrendous and if I wasn't told they were already dead—I would've stormed the Capitol just to make sure they understood what it meant to hurt you to me." Harry's cheeks rose at the comment, a small smile dancing around.

Tom doesn't think he's ever been more proud of himself.

After a while, Tom began to realise they couldn't stop staring at each other. Perhaps they weren't smiling or they were nervous, but they made eye-contact once and it didn't stop. "Your parents gave me their blessing, I think," he knitted his eyebrows together — not sure whether that was true or not. James and Lily were too weird with it. But Harry's expression didn't change, the small smile warm. "I was quite frightened at first. Your father took my hands and observed them before examining my face." He glances off to the side before looking back at him. "They were exhausted from all things considering so I'm guessing they weren't entirely thinking about their actions, not that I'm bothered about it."
"I don't know them well, but—that sounds like what parents would do?" Harry quips.

Tom chuckled under his breath. "Yes, all things considered it does sound like 'parents'."

He tried to keep the topics as normal and generic as possible. For the first meeting, he doesn't think Harry wants to hear about all his opinions on what happened. Throughout the discussion, he noticed how Harry's ring was attached around his necklace. Although, just seeing him smile and look better than how frightened he was - was better. Tom walked slowly to the exit, flashing a small smile at him; Cavernity was the one to ask for his departure.

Once outside, Abelene gave him a hug when the door shut. "How was it?"

He closed his eyes to the touch, almost giddy with his feelings. "Good, better than I hoped."

"I think having Cavernity in there is helping improve things." Abelene leans her head up against his shoulder, still hugging him. He returns the touch. "We were thinking about letting Lily and James enter next but we weren't sure if that was going to be too much. Either way, besides doctors, he's not going to have any more visitors until

tomorrow."

Tom didn't ask if that meant he could go, Abelene not specifying on it. She releases him from the hug and he bows his head at her in thanks. Returning back to his bed where he came from, he ignored the tears that flowed down his face. That whole conversation was exhausting. Trying to empathise and respect his feelings in a I-can-respond-appropriately type-of-way was hard. Tom doesn't think he's ever tried harder to understand someone ever, but if that's what he needed to do —he was happy doing it. Neuro was inside of the quarters. "Holy fuck, are you okay?"

"I saw Harry." Neuro got off the bed and Tom stood there, wanting to sleep.

"No fucking shit, you saw Harry—you look atrocious."

"Keeping me humbled as always."

Neuro rolled his eyes, holding out both his hands to his cheeks, starting to wipe the tears from his eyes. Tom didn't realise how much he was crying until he started and when he noticed, he couldn't stop the dam of emotions that overcame him. "Oh shit," Neuro watched as Tom sat himself on the floor, unable to help himself. "I'm going to get France, I'll be back."

Tom wracked sobs, holding his hands to his face to cover his expression. His shoulders were bouncing as he kept adjusting his legs, unable to keep still. Tears drippled down his cheek and chin, dripping onto his shirt. "Hey, hey," someone from behind him began. It didn't sound like Francisca but when he glanced up, it was Nathaniel. Must Neuro get the closest person? Nathaniel kneeled on the floor taking both his arms from his face, swiping the tears away like Neuro was trying to do. Unfortunately more tears replaced those ones, and all he could say in response was "I'm tired, Nathaniel. You didn't see him. Fuck," and tried to hide his face again. Nathaniel forcefully moved his arms so they couldn't hide himself as he placed them over his shoulders. He kept rubbing his back as he cried.

"I know—I know," Nathaniel leant his head on top of his own.

Tom hiccuped, despite his dislike for showing emotions in-front of others—family being the only ones he was going to; Harry, Francisca, Neuro, but now he supposes he's going to have to add Nathaniel to that list. Tom blinks slowly, reserved. Nathaniel didn't stop rubbing his back around where his spine was. Massaging it, almost. His voice

was low, but Tom heard him. “Everyone thought you were going to break much sooner than you had.”

“Were bets placed on it?” He asked.

“Almost until we thought it was too cruel.”

Tom wasn’t able to laugh.

Nathaniel began to stand them both up, bringing Tom over towards his bed. Laying him down, bringing the blanket over his body, he stood there; just staring at him. Nathaniel commented “I understand, I think I broke down after the whole rescue mission because it was all a bit much.” Tom hummed, laying his head against his pillow. “You rest, I’m going to head back to work.” Tom didn’t realise he had caught him from work but decided he couldn’t care. Neuro stood at the door of the room, observant of the situation. Nathaniel thanked him before leaving.

The teenager entered the room again, heading over to his bed.

Slipping into the bed next to Tom, he leant into his space. “Are you feeling better?”

“I feel like death has hit my door.” Tom shut his eyes tight. “You don’t have to stay, I know Nathaniel told you - you could but that’s only going to eat into your free-time.” Neuro puffed, taking his hands into his own before sleeping. Blinking at the scene, he didn’t realise he was going to go to sleep without that much complaint. Either way, Tom fell asleep with him.

The next morning, Tom woke up to Abelene asking for him.

The two of them walked together towards the hospital and Abelene explained the details to him. “Harry wants to see you again, I think after yesterday he’s quite hopeful things will go well but Cavernity won’t be with him this time so you’re going to have to do overtime with the whole processing of the dynamic.” She eyes him, Tom unsure what she was trying to look for. “Nathaniel said not to bother you last night because you were having some issues, so I didn’t but you have red eyes. I recommend you wash your face before you enter.”

Detouring to a bathroom, he did that. She swipes the blotch on his face she was talking about. “If this is all too much for you—“

“It isn’t.”

“Nobody is going to get mad at you.”

“It’s not too much for me.”

She shrugs her shoulders, explaining. “There was a study on emotions that said: emotions and feelings don’t always correlate during times of need. You might be strong and rigid, thinking you can do something, but you might not always feel like you can. It’s the same with Harry, actually. Sometimes he’s sad but it doesn’t mean he’s sad. Sometimes he’s happy but it doesn’t mean he’s happy. His facial expressions aren’t doing what he wants them to do because they’re bi-products of what he had to go through.”

“His facial expressions?”

“They didn’t care about what he thought in the cells. So his facial expressions aren’t able to detect and manipulate themselves into what he actually thinks. They do what they think is necessary. Trauma response, but with you—I don’t think it’s entirely false from the way Cavernity went about it. She said you were both quite exhausted and overwhelmed to meet each other again. But now the doctors want to see how you do without her.”

“The doctors said that?” Tom stopped. “I thought Harry wanted to see me.”

“He does, Tom.”

“But why do the doctors get to choose whether Cavernity is in the room or not. She’s helped him more than they’ve helped. It’s realistic that she stays in the hospital room until he feels fully comfortable around me.” Abelene is wary before it melts.

Her voice is small. “He is… sort of comfortable around you. It’s just his mind that plays tricks on him. It’s not necessarily that you’ll hurt him, it’s that you’ll turn against him,” Abelene explains. “Apparently, as you already know, they played you in his head heaps of times whilst torturing him so it bounced back into him, registering it as you torturing him. But, that wasn’t the worst of that whole experience I think. I have a feeling it’s got to do—deep down—with his own insecurities.”

“So… it’s not necessarily if I act nonchalant, it’s that I have to be friendly?”

Tom was confused, eyes wide.

“Ah, it’s complicated.” As if he doesn’t already know that. “Harry has some issues about being loved and not being able to fulfil what’s expected of him in a relationship. To people he deem worthy, as such. Cavernity’s in a tricky spot because Harry doesn’t know her well enough to love her—or think she loves him basically so he allows her to be in his space because; well, he doesn’t know her but knows who she’s supposed to be in his life.” She twirls her curl. “I personally think he wants to be with you. I mean, you’re his love. Harry’s yours and he doesn’t want to believe what the torturers said about you and —whatever, but it’s more trying to convince himself.”

“I think what you said about being as far or as close as Harry wanted, surprised him—in a good way—because he wasn’t thinking about that, but you did. Technically, he’s trying to convince his mind that you don’t hate him or won’t do what ‘fake Tom’ kept saying.” Abelene sighed, holding her hand up against the wall, taking a breather. “It’s really complicated to try and word but personally, all you have to do is be kind. I don’t think ‘fake Tom’ was at all so just be there for him and Harry will start to melt the persona he has around you at the moment.”

Tom felt his brain fry. “You guys caught that entirely from one conversation?”

“Many trials,” Abelene explained briefly—as if he was going to understand just from that.

He sighed and realised he would have to accept it for what it was.

The door to Harry’s room was right in front of them and Abelene walked towards it with Tom following behind. She stands before it, turning to him. “Remember, all you have to do is speak kindly and to never mention any horrible pet names such as mutt, dog, boy, whatever.” At the warning, he thanked her. The door opened and he slid into the room, knowing somewhere, they were watching their interaction. That bothered the fuck out of Tom, since he didn’t want anyone observing him but for Harry’s specific case, he thought maybe —maybe it was necessary so they were able to look after him well.

Harry appears better. The bruises that were around his body were starting to fade a bit. Tom was glad. Then, Harry pointed to the chair next to his bed. “I want you to sit there.”

Blinking at the order but not about to decline him, he nodded his head

and went to take a seat. Tom predicted he was nearly a metre away from Harry - which was a lot of progress in his book. Harry fiddled with his fingers, eyebrows angled together. Worried about something. Tom wanted to soothe those worries but knew he wouldn't be able to do it through directly asking him. Instead, he commented on the food. "Yeah, I know—" looking down at what Harry had to eat, "the food is quite… plain all things considering."

Harry's wrinkles lessened, eyes glancing over his tray. Tom thought to himself. "Maybe I can get you one of the pomegranates Nathaniel picked from the outside before the whole incident happened? They're quite sweet and certainly will taste better than that."

"Pomegranates?" He tilted his head, blinking.

Tom agreed. "Yes, they're a sweet fruit. I'm sure you can have all of them if you want."

Harry partially opened his lips as if he was about to say something but he didn't. Tom decided the conversation needed to move on. "How's the lights in here?" He glanced up, noticing how goldenly they were and the dimness level they were set to. It was a mixture so it wasn't overly bright but not too dark either. "These lights are much better than the ones in our rooms."

"They are?"

"If you can imagine, we're underground so there isn't any natural light down here as such." Tom explained, fiddling with his ring. "They're all bright lights and if not any, just pure darkness. Although, there are always night lights so if something were to happen—we can see." Harry wrinkled his nose, focusing on his every word. "I think once this war is over; I won't ever be underground again. Somewhere where there's a lot of natural light."

Harry cocked his head, agreeing with him.

He asked Tom, "have you thought about living in a District?"

"A District," Tom pursed his lips, before eyeing Harry—not sure if what he was about to say was too much, "I would live in a District if I had you." A fond smile blossomed onto his face but his eyes were wary. "I think the outskirts of a District would work as well, where nobody would be able to find me or you after this."

"I'd like that," Harry murmurs.

Tom hummed, thinking about what could happen after the war. “Maybe we could build a house ourselves. Chop wood from the forest, have help with concrete slabs, work something out.” Actually, with his words, Harry’s eyes softened. His eyebrow lines were less prominent and he sat there, content. His lips kept changing smiles the more he thought about the idea, turning away from him. Tom played with his ring. “I think if we were going to have a house, it’d have to have big windows. I keep thinking of a nice kitchen for some reason…”

Harry smiled, “a kitchen?”

“Yes, I don’t know what it is with the idea but I think having a lovely living room with a kitchen would be nice. Almost like the houses at Victor’s Village but better, more warm and decorated.” Tom is unable to stop himself from fiddling with his ring. Harry notices, eyeing it. Tom bit his inner-cheek, holding his hand out slowly to him. Harry took his hand and inspected the ring.

“It’s gorgeous,” he comments.

“I really find diamonds to mean nothing when everyone else has got them,” Tom admits, glancing away, “and I find that gemstones with meanings that match people are what makes a ring. I mean, you’d rather it mean something to you than to show off?” Harry fiddles with Tom’s ring before showing him his. Tom stares at his ring. “I thought you’d like the red colour because it’s bright and colourful.” Harry laughed as if that was funny, Tom pausing. “Is something wrong with the ring?”

His man shakes his head. “No, nothing’s wrong with it. People like giving me red for some reason.”

“We could change it if you’d like.”

“No,” he disagrees, “I like it.”

“That’s… that’s good.”

Tom glances down at his ring. “Green’s my favourite colour; emerald, for reasons I’d rather not explain.” Harry rose his eyebrow at the statement before telling Tom he had to tell him now. He looks into Harry’s eyes and flushes, knowing that was the reason why. He pouts before he says, “your eyes. They’re emerald, and I quite literally get lost in them every time I look at you.”

Harry flushes, and Tom thinks he’s making progress.

End Notes

Again, here - if you'd like to - is where you can donate for Palestine **P S**
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